



The present monograph on the distinguished freedom fighter and the pioneering Communist leader Puran Chandra Joshi or P C Joshi, as he was popularly known, is as much an analysis of the leader as it is of the making of the Communist movement and the Party in the country and the unique dilemmas associated with its growth in India. It brings to light the relentless endeavour of the visionary leader in the thirties and the forties to seek common grounds with the progressive and secular elements of different political streams in order to fight the imperialist forces on the one hand, and the communal and reactionary forces, on the other. Joshi's stance, which did not find favour with the 'hands off' approach of the leadership of the Communist Party in 1948 as regards seeking associations with other like-minded political parties to build and protect the freedom of the newly independent nation, seems to have become all the more relevant in the contemporary India thus vindicating the vision of this great political, cultural and social leader. Brought out especially to commemorate the centenary of his birth, the monograph puts the role of Joshi and the communist movement in India in the proper historical perspective while throwing valuable insights on this multifaceted personality.

Gargi Chakravartty teaches history in Maitreyi College, University of Delhi. Her book *Gandhi: A Challenge to Communalism*, published in 1987, is a critical appraisal of Gandhi's crusade against the forces of communalism from 1919-1929. Her latest book entitled *Coming out of Partition: Refugee Women of Bengal*, published in 2005, narrates the experiences of Bengali women, their trauma followed by the struggle for food shelter and job in the post-Partition era.



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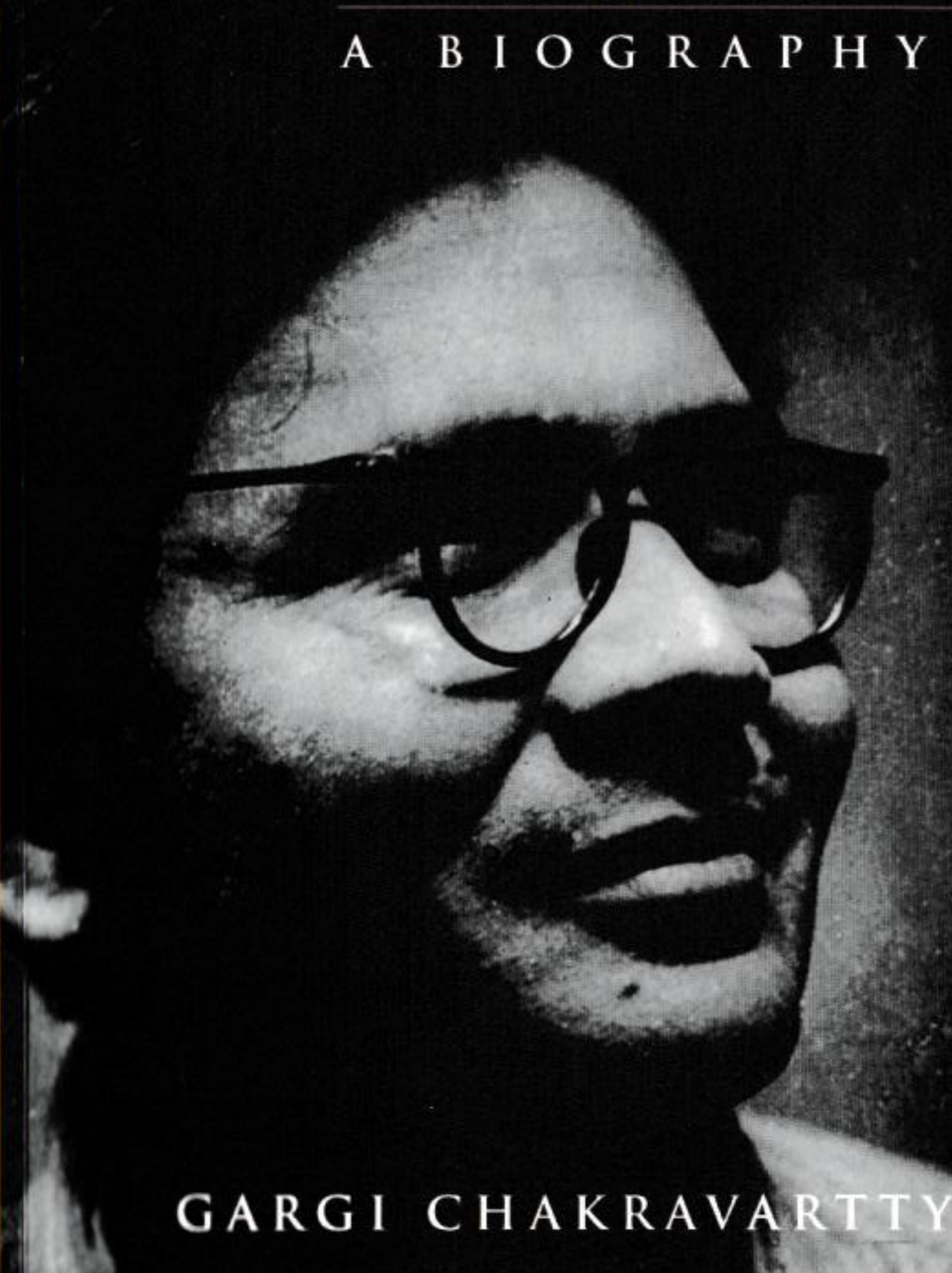
ISBN 978-81-237-5052-1

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GARGI CHAKRAVARTTY

P. C. JOSHI

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Contents

	<i>Foreword</i>	vii
	<i>Preface</i>	ix
I	Early Years	1
II	Political Baptism: Meerut Conspiracy Case and Beyond	5
III	A Mass Organiser	25
IV	Joshi and the National Movement	54
V	Post-Independence: The Struggle Within	78
VI	The Humanist	109

Cover Photograph: Sunil Janah

ISBN 978-81-237-5052-1

First Edition 2007 (*Saka* 1929)

First Reprint 2008 (*Saka* 1929)

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Rs 45.00

Published by the Director, National Book Trust, India
A-5 Green Park, New Delhi-110 016

Foreword

Being put in charge of the fledgling the Communist Party of India in 1935 at the young age of 28, P C Joshi succeeded in raising its strength from about 50 members to about 90,000 members in 1947. More importantly, he made the CPI an important force in national politics and in the peasants' and workers' movements.

Joshi was a rare Communist who was aware of the role of artists, writers, scientists and other intellectuals in society. He developed links of the Party with some of the major intellectuals of the country. He played a pioneering role in the formation of the Indian Peoples Theatre Association. He gathered a brilliant team of scattered artists, singers, dancers/poets and playwrights and forged an organization the like of which did not exist in the past and has not existed since.

Over time, he also began to understand better the role of the Indian National Movement, of which he made the CPI an important part.

Unfortunately, just when he had matured as a political leader, Joshi was thrown out of the Party leadership for the crime of having declared that India had become independent in 1947.

Despite grave provocations, Joshi remained loyal to the

CPI and helped it evolve from, and get out of the morass of, the Cominform-imposed political line of '*Yeh Azadi Jhooti Hai*'.

Joshi invariably took principled positions in Indian politics even though he refused to play a major role in CPI's organizational matters. While condemning Chinese aggression in 1962, he opposed detention of the Left-Communist leaders. He was not in favour of CPI's unprincipled alliance with communal right-wing forces in the Samyukda Vidhayak Dal governments in 1967. And, above all, he warned the Indian people that the communal forces posed the most important threat to Indian democracy and development.

Gargi Chakravartty is to be congratulated for having captured in print, the major facets of P C Joshi's life, one of modern India's major political and cultural figures, on his 100th birth anniversary.

PROF. BIPAN CHANDRA

Preface

Puran Chandra Joshi, popularly known as P.C. Joshi, a great patriot and the builder of the communist movement in India, is now relegated to oblivion. His has been a life dedicated to the nation, to the people and to the Communist Party which he had built up brick by brick as the General Secretary during the late thirties and forties in a difficult era of our freedom struggle. His was not an ordinary life—it was a life of struggle within and outside, untiringly fighting for a cherished dream with a firm conviction, even when he became physically immobile due to poor health.

Here was a leader whose charismatic personality and humaneness inspired so many young and old people, toiling masses and intellectuals for decades, a visionary who could think and act simultaneously, who could understand the political reality, an organiser who elevated the infant Communist Party to a national stature, and yet who was cornered and ignored by his fellow travellers at the fag end of his life. Till his last breath he waged a relentless struggle to unite the country's secular, democratic forces against Right reaction of all shades. It is an irony that whereas nobody understood his politics of National Front in his lifetime, today the same politics is being carried forward

by the existing Left formations in our country and that too at a time when he would have crossed his century had he been alive.

To write a biography of such a multifaceted, outstanding, intensely political thinker and organiser is a challenging task indeed. Almost all his close associates are no more, and this void cannot be filled. After P.C. Joshi's death in November 1980, prominent Communist leaders like Hiren Mukerjee, Satyapal Dang and his close followers Govind Vidyarthi, Ishwar Bhatt, Dilip Bose, Sunil Sen and P.C. Joshi, the economist, paid rich tributes recalling those glorious days of his General Secretaryship. On the occasion of his centenary this year (2007), a few more reminiscences have come throwing valuable insights with a lot of information. Of these, the ones written by Rekha Jain, a prominent artiste in the Cultural Squad set up by Joshi, Subrata Banerjee, who stayed in the party headquarters in Bombay in the forties, Satyapal Dang and Sunil Munshi, the student leaders of those days, are full of anecdotes and personal experiences of Joshi.

The brittle yellow pages of the journals of the Communist Party during Joshi's time — *National Front*, *People's War*, *People's Age* — replete with reports, articles, reportages, sketches of Chittaprosad, and photographs of Sunil Janah of movements, politics and the people of that period have enriched my understanding of Joshi and his ideological pursuit. I am particularly grateful to the staff of the Ajay Bhavan Library and Archives of Contemporary India at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, which was built by P.C. Joshi himself and still remains a treasure house of materials on the Left movement in the country.

I found some of the biographical publications, even if a bit subjective and personal, to be a useful source of history as these mirror the inner-party life and the response of the comrades to national and international events. I would

like to make a special mention of Manikuntala Sen's *In Search of Freedom: An Unfinished Journey*, Mohit Sen's *A Traveller and the Road: The Journey of an Indian Communist* and Ganesh Shukla's unpublished manuscript *CPI: An Insider's View*. I must specially thank Ravi Bakaya for giving me some rare articles written by Joshi over the years and reprinted in *The New Thinking Communist*. I am also thankful to P.C. Joshi, the economist, whom I bothered on several occasions with all my queries and who ungrudgingly tried to find out the lost links of Joshi's personal life. Unfortunately, little could be gathered about Joshi's childhood and early life.

I have extensively quoted from P.C. Joshi's notes on himself written on November 7, 1968 when he was staying in Hauz Khas, New Delhi. However, those quotations are not indexed in the footnotes.

To travel through the trajectory of events of complex dialectics marking Joshi's seventy-year life-span and constructing a political biography has been a difficult task. Readers should forgive my limitations. I can only hope that this first venture would be followed by better attempts at bringing out a more comprehensive and analytical work on P.C. Joshi's life, politics, ideas and activities in the coming days.

GARGI CHAKRAVARTTY

EARLY YEARS

P.C. Joshi was born at the foothills of the Himalayas at Almora on April 14, 1907. His father, Pandit Har Nandan Joshi, was one of the most famous headmasters of that period. Later he became the Director of Education of the State of Rewa in the then Central Provinces. He died prematurely, drowned in the River Ghagra near the Rewa Fort. His mother, Malati Devi, died of TB at a very young age when Joshi was only ten years old. His only sister, while nursing her mother, contracted the disease and soon died. This had a lasting impact on his life.

His father had a transferable job. Joshi spent his motherless childhood with uncles and aunts in a joint family or in hostels.

During his years in school, the waves of Gandhiji's non-cooperation movement had reached even the hills. Gandhiji's programme of surrendering government titles, boycott of government schools, colleges, law courts, rejection of foreign cloth and non-payment of taxes created a new Swadeshi ambience. His concept of non-violence and non-cooperation brought rays of hope and confidence to the pine forests and hill slopes. Puran, a young boy, felt elevated by Gandhiji's cry of Swaraj. He passed Matric from Government High School in Hapur (Meerut District) in 1920.

But once the movement was withdrawn followed by increasing incidents of Hindu-Muslim riots, Puran, then in his teens, was disturbed and distressed by the flow of events, and became confused. In 1922, he passed his Intermediate examination as a student of Almora's Government Intermediate College with a gold medal in Sanskrit. Thereafter he was sent to Allahabad, considered in those days as the breeding-ground for the ICS. He graduated from the Allahabad University with English, History and Economics in 1924. He passed his M.A. in 1928 and LL.B. the following year from the same University.

Allahabad proved to be a turning point in Joshi's life. As a student of Allahabad University he had the opportunity of being in touch with the most distinguished teachers of his time—Tara Chand, Beni Prasad, R.P. Tripathi and Ishwari Prasad. The influence of these historians had a deep impact on him. Much later one saw the emergence of Joshi the historian with his masterpiece on the 1857 Rebellion on the occasion of the centenary of that event.

Allahabad was also the centre of national politics. On the one hand, there were traditionalists like Madan Mohan Malaviya and on the other, the cosmopolitan and secularists like Motilal Nehru. Joshi was drawn into politics, joined the Motilal group and by 1925 became a khadi-clad nationalist. Within a year he was an activist of the Naujawan Bharat Sabha.

He became a member of the Allahabad Youth League whose President was Jawaharlal Nehru. It was actually a federation of study circles of young intellectuals. Joshi was attracted towards Anand Bhawan like all political minded students of those days. Initially, he found Nehru looking troubled, uncommunicative and inwardly thoughtful. It was only after his participation in the International Congress against Colonial Oppression and Imperialism at Brussels in 1927 and his visit to the Soviet Union that Nehru had a

message of his own to give. He returned as a "self-conscious revolutionary radical" and his articles on the USSR were an eye-opener. Nehru's passionate plea for complete independence as against the undefined Swaraj of Mahatma Gandhi found a warm response in the hearts of Joshi, and so he readily became a member of the Allahabad Youth League.

But the Calcutta session of the Indian National Congress in 1928 was a disillusionment for Joshi as he looked forward to Nehru to oppose the report of the All Parties Committee headed by his father Motilal Nehru. It was a communal patch-up, keeping aside the demand for independence if the British Government agreed to dominion status within a year. Joshi expected Nehru to oppose it. The Nehru Report and the Hindu Mahasabha's stubborn opposition to the Muslim demands virtually isolated the nationalist Muslims and weakened their position. Nehru succumbed to the pressures of the senior Congress leaders. Joshi later recalled those days: "Nehru as the idol came down not only to my own esteem but of most of the Left youth who had assembled there (Calcutta) to hold the first All India Youth Congress."¹ This disillusionment drove him towards the Communists.

This was the time he met Aftab Ali, a labour leader of Calcutta, who belonged to his home district Almora, and it was from him that he got smuggled copies of Rajani Palme Dutt's *Modern India* (1926) and M.N. Roy's *Future of Indian Politics* (1926). He was impressed by R.P. Dutt's (RPD) analysis though at that time he had more respect for M.N. Roy. Since then RPD became his guiding spirit. Joshi wrote: "RPD became our teacher and guide. His *Modern India* became our text and his *Labour Monthly* 'Notes of the

1. P.C. Joshi, "The Nehru Legacy: A Self-critical Communist Evaluation", *New Thinking Communist*, December 1, 1998

Month'—the commentary that kept us going."² He was then, in his own words, "a student communist, busy organising youth leagues in various universities and linking up Congress-Left and local pro-communist revolutionary groups into the units of Workers' and Peasants' Party (the CPI's open forum in those days)".³ Thus began his political journey on the new communist path.

II

POLITICAL BAPTISM Meerut Conspiracy Case and Beyond

The national movement was going through a difficult phase in the mid-twenties. A large number of youth got disillusioned with the Gandhian strategy of non-violent struggle particularly after the sudden withdrawal of the non-cooperation movement in 1922. Communal riots erupted in various parts of the country and movements like the tabliq and tanzim among the Muslims, shuddhi and sangathan among the Hindus gained ground. The general disillusionment unfolded a new scenario wherein revolutionary heroism attracted the educated youth while a few of them were drawn towards Marxism. The arrival of the Simon Commission, with its all-White members, to India in November 1927 triggered widespread popular indignation resulting in a wave of anti-imperialist struggles, but the impact was temporary. The Congress failed to fulfil the expectations and aspirations of the people and that led to the formation of Left groups through trade unions and kisan sabhas.

This was the time of P.C. Joshi's political baptism with his joining the Peasants' and Workers' Party: he became the Joint Secretary of its UP unit at its Meerut session in September 1928. It is here that he came in contact with

² P.C. Joshi, "Rajani Palme Dutt and Indian Communists", *New Thinking Communist*, March 1, 2001.

³ Quoted by Satyapal Dang, in his unpublished article on P.C. Joshi, written on April 13, 2001.

Communist activists like R.D. Bharadwaj and S.G. Sardesai. Joshi was convinced that the All India Workers' and Peasants' Party could achieve independence from British imperialism through a revolution. Communists were few in number and were mostly influenced by the British Communist Party that acted as its ideological mentor. The British Communists who played a significant role in laying the foundations of the working class movement in India in the mid-twenties were Rajani Palme Dutt, Philip Spratt and Ben Bradley. These British Communists immensely impressed Joshi at his young age. He met Spratt and Bradley in 1928, when he found that they had gone completely Indian, living among them and behaving as one of them.

They acted as catalytic agents. Spratt, the Cambridge graduate, helped to unify the scattered Indian contacts into organised local groups, unified through a commonly accepted national policy and evolved through discussions among themselves. Bradley, the engineering worker, led the Indian Communists from the stage of reading and talking and casually writing about the working class to sinking themselves physically in the working class, and learning to organise and lead the workers. Together they introduced method and organisation into our traditional easy-going Indian ways.¹

They were all critical of Gandhi and the leadership of the Indian National Congress.

This was the period when the country witnessed massive labour upsurge in such sectors as railways, cotton textiles and jute.

In December 1928, the Calcutta working class gave a striking demonstration of its growing political involvement and maturity when, led by the Workers' and Peasants' Party, thousands of workers marched into the

Congress session, occupied the *pandal* for two hours and passed resolutions demanding *Purna Swaraj*.²

This was generally seen as the outcome of the communist penetration into trade unions.

The British Government was quite alarmed at the increasing rate of strikes spreading from Jamshedpur, Bombay, Calcutta to the other parts of the country. The Government brought the Public Safety Bill to detain the British Communists who had been organising the Bengal and Bombay workers. The tribunals of the Trade Disputes Act of 1929 intended to ban strikes. The Government unleashed repression on labour leaders. On March 20, 1929, 31 labour leaders were arrested; many of them were Communists. And they included three British Communists—Bradley, Spratt and Hutchinson—as well as Indian labour leaders like S.V. Ghate, S.A. Dange, S.S. Mirajkar, Dr G. Adhikari, Muzaffar Ahmed, Dharani Goswami and Gopen Chakraborty. P.C. Joshi was also picked up from Holland Hostel in Allahabad on March 20, 1929. He was the youngest of the convicts—22 years old. In fact, he became a member of the Communist Party the same year. The trial continued for three years in Meerut and that is why this case came to be known as the Meerut Conspiracy Case.

This trial proved counter-productive for the British. The Communist convicts, through their articulate and convincing defence speeches, were able to effectively convey their ideals and vision of an independent India. Those speeches were widely publicised in the media. The Congress leadership condemned the Meerut prosecution and at least eight members of the All India Congress Committee were involved in defending the Meerut prisoners. The Meerut

² For details see Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India*, Macmillan, Delhi, 1983, pp. 269-270

¹ P.C. Joshi, "Rajani Palme Dutt and Indian Communists," *op.cit.*

Defence Committee was set up with Motilal Nehru as its Chairman and Mahatma Gandhi himself visited the prisoners in the jail. This trial thus helped to bring the nationalist forces closer to the Communists.

Moreover the jail became the veritable centre of Marxist education. This was the time when Joshi voraciously read all the Marxist classics and he was guided by the elders within the prison. The jail years became the years of his ideological schooling for the rest of his life. He acquired valuable experiences during that time and he wrote later in his life:

As brief writer for the eminent lawyers who defended us (but) did not know anything about our ideology, policy or activities, I had to summarise the entire mass of evidence (record of speeches, political, trade union and kisan activities) for them, and in a manner they would understand it and present a political defence and not merely legal or juridical. Our agreement with the Defence Committee, headed by Pandit Motilal Nehru, was that the lawyers like M.C. Chagla, Diwan Chamanlal in the Lower Courts, and Dr K.N. Katju, assisted by Miss Shyam Kumari Nehru in the High Court, will put up a political defence as directed by us along with the legal defence as they think best. This taught me to think out Marxism-Leninism and the policy of the International in terms of India's national-political reality, and the best approach to put across our propaganda.

Everyday I had also to produce the text of the proceedings of the Court for the press reporters who were too ignorant and lazy to do it themselves, and were grateful for the copy supplied to them free and safe. That is how the Meerut Conspiracy Case got much better publicised politically though the Lahore Case (Bhagat Singh's) was more exciting and sensational.

In his defence, P.C. Joshi argued in a well-crafted

manner. The defence document, containing 65 typed pages, is in itself a masterpiece for any political case study. He began his defence before R.L. Yorke, Additional Sessions Judge at Meerut, on April 24, 1931 with these words:

My name is Puran Chand* Joshi; my father's name is Pandit Har Nandan Joshi. I am by caste No caste: 24 years of age, by occupation student; my hometown is at Almora Police Station, Almora district, Almora; I reside at Almora.

At one point he said:

British imperialism under the plea of communism and on the basis of the judgment of this case wants to declare all agitation and organisation for genuine national Independence, that is, the platform of Independence through Revolution illegal and criminal by subsequent legislation. This case (Meerut Conspiracy Case) is nothing else but crude propaganda for this sinister counter-revolutionary end.

He concluded by exposing the exploitative character of British imperialism. The texture of his arguments saw the making of a leader:

British Imperialism, organised into a social system with decadent Indian feudalism and corrupt Indian Capitalism, means unheard of poverty and unparalleled slavery of the Indian masses. The social progress of India and the life of the Indian masses demand the destruct of this Bourgeois-Feudal Imperialism. For having struggled against this vicious and unbearable social system, for being revolutionaries, we will be condemned to imprisonment. National revolution, however, cannot be postponed by depriving a few revolutionaries of their personal freedom, revolution is both inevitable and necessary, it will come.

* Though here Joshi identified himself as Puran Chand Joshi, among his friends and relatives he was known as Puran Chandra Joshi.

National revolution is the historical impeachment of British Imperialism by the Indian masses and then bullets and not words will speak.

... As far as the charge against us as accused is concerned, we consider it a fraudulent prosecution of opinions and cannot take it seriously. But we take the trial itself very seriously. In this case we are not on trial but British Imperialism is on trial before our final Judges, the Indian Masses. We are not accused but Prosecutors. We have no doubt that the final judgment of our real Judges will be forward to "Revolution". Mr Mitra, Junior Crown Counsel, is seemingly interrupting me, on that Red Day he will cry and not laugh.

Mr Kemp should realise that we are revolutionaries, not philistines...

While exposing the economic exploitation of British imperialism in India, he analysed in detail the prevailing colonial system. In this context, he was influenced by RPD and Otto Kuusinen's report at the Sixth World Congress of the Comintern (1928). This document and the draft resolution in India in March 1930, called upon the Indian Communists to fight against Gandhism as it was playing a counter-revolutionary role.

Worker Peasant Parties were branded as petty bourgeois outfits which interfered with workers' and peasants' movements. While calling for establishing a centralised party, the Communists were asked to put forward their programme of bourgeois democratic revolution on the basis of the following slogans: general political strike as the central task, propaganda for an armed revolution and soviets as organs of revolt, agrarian revolution, overthrow of imperialism and establishment, in the forms of soviets, of revolutionary dictatorship of the working class and peasants.³

Joshi was indeed a "young marvel", as renowned Communist parliamentarian Hiren Mukherjee put it, drawn deeply into the revolution despite academic excellence that could lure him into easier ways of existence, the youngest among that stalwart band of Meerut Conspiracy prisoners, the quality of his English, almost strangely idiomatic and terse (which surprised the British Judge!), his mind imbibing in jail and in association with some top working class leaders in joint custody the essence of the Indian situation and the way out of the impasse that imperialism had created in our old and complicated country.⁴

As a prisoner Joshi carved out a place for himself for three reasons: first, he was the best draftsman having writing skill; he used to write legal notes, memoranda, etc. on behalf of all the prisoners. Secondly, he impressed others by his humble, self-effacing nature, and tried to bring them together. Thirdly, even in jail he led a disciplined life—his excellent gardening was appreciated by all.

After his release from jail in 1933, Joshi worked as a party organiser in UP; he had his base in industrial Kanpur. 'Here,' as Joshi writes, 'I got my much-needed baptism in the working class movement, but young over enthusiastic as I was, I let myself be arrested leading the Muir Mill strike, which was to be in a chain in the All-India Textile Workers' Strike during 1934-depression years.' Joshi was sentenced to two years imprisonment under Sections 124 A and 153 A but won the highest possible remission, six months, as an ideal prisoner, acting as the *mali* and the *dhobi*.

On the national scenario, the Round Table talks in London between the British Government and Indian leaders proved to be a failure. This led to the resumption of Gandhiji's civil disobedience movement. As a consequence,

3 Shobhanlal Dutta Gupta, *Comintern and the Destiny of Communism in India 1919-1943*, Seribaan, Kolkata, 2006, p. 141.

4 Hiren Mukherjee, "Joshi—The Man", *New Age*, November 16, 1980.

the Congress party was declared illegal and mass repression followed. Indian Communists failed to realise the political significance of Gandhi's civil disobedience and remained isolated from the mainstream freedom struggle. Joshi was a helpless witness to the rapid liquidation of the gains achieved by the pioneers of the Communist Movement. The vacuum created by the Meerut arrests came to be filled by B.T. Ranadive and Deshpande, who following the Comintern directions, not only denounced the existing national bourgeois leadership but disowned the freedom movement itself and kept out of the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930-34. "The historic price for this infantile folly", as P.C. Joshi writes, "was the first split in the party during 1931, with Comrades Ranadive and Deshpande competing with each other in leftism."⁵

The Communist Party, still in a rudimentary form, was more concerned with its organisational lacunae and did not question the efficacy or feasibility of the current political line chalked out by the Sixth Congress of the Communist International. Within the jail, the Meerut convicts sent their viewpoints to the comrades outside, saying that their political line was unrealistic and such revolutionary outpourings would isolate them even from the Communist worker and also the masses. But as loyal comrades, they could not challenge them on fundamentals. P.C. Joshi writes:

The stand that we took in the 'joint statement' made before the Sessions Judge of Meerut was squarely based on the Sixth Congress line, an effective petty bourgeois-revolutionary document and not a creative application of Marxism-Leninism to Indian conditions.⁶

This clearly shows that Joshi was not happy with the

⁵ P.C. Joshi, "Rajani Palme Dutt and Indian Communists", *op.cit.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

political line of the Communists not joining the Civil Disobedience Movement.

The growing threat of fascism and war and the virtual split between the Allied Powers comprising Britain, France, America and Axis Powers—Germany, Italy, Japan—pushed the whole world towards what Tagore described as the 'Crisis in Civilisation'. The international communist movement, realising the imminent danger of fascism, gave a call to the toiling masses to rally round the anti-imperialist National Fronts in colonial and semi-colonial countries such as India and China and to form Popular Fronts in the advanced states of the West. The Seventh Congress—the last one—of the Communist International in 1935 focused on this new line of the United Front policy. Accordingly, the Communist International shifted its position on the nature of the Congress leadership and started viewing the Congress as an anti-imperialist national organisation.

The Seventh World Congress of the Comintern (1935) was a turning point in the history of the communist movement. Ben Bradley alias Tambe of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), who was also a convict in the Meerut Conspiracy Case, spoke at the Congress on behalf of India.

The young Communist Party of India exposes the falsity of the national reformist policy and carries among the masses the slogans of anti-imperialist and anti-feudal revolutions. However, up till now it has been unable to paralyse the influence of the national reformists among the masses. Up till now it has been unable to rally and attract the active and advanced strata of these masses for revolutionary struggle, and has been unable to wrest these masses away from the influence of the National Congress, despite the number of partial successes achieved by it in this direction.

That is the reason why the masses, while expressing their discontent with the Gandhi leadership and that of

other capitulators and conciliators with imperialism, did not at the same time break with the Congress and in a certain sense, still view the Congress headed by the national reformist bourgeoisie and the liberal landlords as an organisation representing the all-national opposition against imperialism.⁷

The RPD-Ben Bradley thesis, which promoted the strategy of united front for the CPI to implement, was published in *Imprecor* on February 29, 1936. It ended the oscillation between the anti-Congress sectarian line of the Sixth Congress and the National Front perspective of the Seventh Congress. It was difficult for the Indian Communists to accept the change in political line of working unitedly with organisations so far branded as reformist. But events in Europe, the emergence of fascism, and the need for popular fronts for resistance subsequently changed their mindset. Joshi played a crucial role in explaining the new line across the country.

There was an inbuilt resistance to this new line within the Communist Party of India which was a small outfit with a few members in working class belts. To most of the Indian Communists, the Congress did not represent the class interests of the masses and there was no guarantee that the Congress would represent those interests in the future as well. Within the Congress, the Right-wing was consolidating its influence due to the patronage of and pressure from the business class since around 1934.

But there was another side of the story. Before the Seventh Congress of the Comintern (1935) itself, the Communists from Meerut jail after their release started groping to find a way out of the sectarian swamp, seeking trade-union unity and trying to work with the Left

⁷ For details, see Shobhanlal Dutt Gupta, *op.cit.*, pp. 183-184.

nationalists on the basis of consistent anti-imperialism. That was how the Anti-Imperialist League came to be established. Dr Gangadhar Adhikari, popularly known as Doc, was persuaded to become the General Secretary of the Communist Party, but the British rounded up all the Communists while they had been actively working for an all India general strike of the textile workers.

It was at this critical juncture that P.C. Joshi, a young man of 28, took over the reins of the fledgling Communist Party. There had been intermittent efforts to set up a Party centre to carry on the functioning of the organisation uninterrupted. Widespread sectarianism and factional fights in and outside the jail virtually split the Communists into quarrelling groups. RPD was sent to explore the possibility of setting up an All-India Communist Party and to evolve political strategies of the Communists vis-a-vis the national movement as well as to form an anti-imperialist National Front in tune with the guidelines of the Seventh Congress of the Communist International. He met all the towering figures of the Communist groups working in Bombay, Calcutta and Kanpur and found them to be too preoccupied with themselves. The only exception was the young and energetic P.C. Joshi who had the clear vision of bringing out the party from political isolation and factionalism, who could relate to the interests and tasks before the nation at large, who could think of the Communists joining a broad national anti-imperialist front. Being impressed with this vibrant young man, RPD recommended his name to the relevant bodies of the international communist movement; and consequently, Joshi was asked to shoulder the responsibility of setting up an All-India Communist Party. However, much later in his life Joshi wrote with a sense of regret: "This responsibility came too early in my life, which cost me and the Party very dear in the long run."

P.C. Joshi acted as the *de facto* General Secretary of the

CPI after his release from jail, bringing together—along with Ajoy Ghosh and R.D. Bharadwaj—the disorganised groups into a cohesive party structure with an underground party centre, as the party was then illegal, and started bringing out pamphlets, leaflets and journals. Joshi undertook effective measures to unify the scattered groups. Through the undercover party functionaries like Katdare, contact was established with Michael Caritt, who was an ICS posted in Calcutta, and Michael Scott in Bombay, and a meeting was held in June 1936. This meeting was attended by Joshi, Ajoy Ghosh, Bharadwaj and Michael Scott. Joshi was elected to the post of General Secretary of the party in June 1936 at the Surat session of the provisional Central Committee and continued to remain so till 1948. The party headquarters was set up in Calcutta with Ajoy Ghosh in charge of coordinating activities in the western zone, Bharadwaj in the north and S.V. Ghate in the south. Dr G. Adhikari joined the centre in Calcutta.

The year 1936 was a milestone in the annals of the Leftist mass movements. Not only did Joshi become the General Secretary of the CPI, but it also saw the birth of organisations like the Progressive Writers' Association, All India Students' Federation and Chhatri Sangha. P.C. Joshi realised the need to build a progressive writers' movement in India following the international conference of writers held in Paris on June 21, 1935. This was a rallying point in defence of culture against fascism attended by Maxim Gorky, Louis Aragon, Andre Malraux, E.M. Forster and others. There had been widespread persecution of writers, scientists, intellectuals etc. by the fascist forces. The absence of any democratic space forced many of them to leave their countries. Even the world famous scientist, Albert Einstein, was compelled to go out of Germany. This world conference brought about a new awareness towards initiating a progressive anti-fascist cultural movement in India. Joshi

had the vision to realise its importance and soon a manifesto was prepared. This was released in February 1936. It was signed by renowned writers of that period—Sajjad Zaheer, Prem Chand, Abid Hussain, Daya Narain Nigam, Abdul Haq and many others. The effort was to bring art nearer to the people. Writers from all over the country gathered in Lucknow on April 10, 1936 and without much preparation organised the First All India Progressive Writers' Conference where politically and socially committed writers gave a new dimension to creative writing. Branches of the PWA were set up in Calcutta and other cities. P.C. Joshi could make the vast sections of the intelligentsia sensitive towards the toiling masses. Prem Chand's *Godan* (1936), a portrayal of the plight of the peasant, was a distinct departure from his earlier novel *Rangbhumi* (1925), which had depicted Gandhian idealism. This genre of writers created a new ambience of anti-fascist, anti-feudal people's culture and this trend continued in the entire period of Joshi's General Secretaryship of the party—from the peasant poets' conference held at Faridabad in 1938 to the First All India Conference of Urdu Progressive Writers held at Hyderabad from October 14 to 17, 1945, inaugurated by Sarojini Naidu.

Gandhism started losing its appeal and revolutionary heroism was also dying down. A large number of students came under the spell of the Leftist ideology. The All India Students' Federation (AISF) was formed in 1936. Local, national and international issues were textured together to give a new perspective to the students. The AISF began its campaign with the call for release of all political prisoners in 1937-38, demanded election of students unions and carried on with demonstrations in solidarity with the people of Spain during the Spanish Civil War and the Chinese battling against Japanese aggression. Social work like an adult literacy campaign combined with political struggle against the menace of imperialism, acquired a new meaning

in the emerging students' movement. For the first time young men and women were taught to link national issues with international questions.

P.C. Joshi soon became the inspiration for these young student comrades. What impressed them most was not only his clarity in political arguments in discourses on imperialism, fascism and the imperative need for joint front between the Communists and nationalists, but his emphatic advice to them to become proficient in their work and studies. He asked the students to be the best in their academic life so that other students look upto them; this would help draw the latter towards them. P.C. Joshi conducted study classes, lectures and also gave them personal advice—individually and sometimes collectively. Satyapal Dang, a former AIFS General Secretary, recalled his student days and referred to an advice Joshi gave him once:

When you go to sleep at night think of all that you did during the day; sort out what was right and what was incorrect and then take a resolve to avoid mistakes in future.

RPD met Jawaharlal Nehru in Switzerland to discuss the possibility of making the Indian National Congress as the broad united anti-imperialist forum of National Front bringing all the fighting people of India together. P.C. Joshi met Nehru along with the representatives of the Communist International during the Lucknow session of the Congress (1936) that was presided over by Nehru himself. Nehru agreed to the proposal of affiliating the AITUC and AIKS to the Indian National Congress. He took Joshi to Mahatma Gandhi who agreed to accept the proposal provided Vallabhbhai Patel gave his consent. Joshi approached Patel who warned him that the Communists should either choose to stay within the Congress or to fight for the affiliation of

peasants' and workers' organisations. Joshi firmly replied that the Communists would stay within the Congress and also fight for the affiliation of the AITUC and AIKS to the INC. At no point did Joshi compromise with his political convictions.

This was the period when there were kisan marches, meetings, struggles over local issues. The first session of the All India Kisan Sabha in Lucknow in April 1936 marked the formation of the all India kisan body. The Kisan Manifesto of 1936 voiced the demand for the abolition of zamindari, a limited tax on agricultural incomes and cancellation of debts. It also suggested "transfer of uncultivated government and zamindari lands to peasants with less than five acres and to the landless..."⁸ The Bengal Provincial Kisan Sabha was established at Bankura district in March 1937—and the Kisan Sabha membership rose up to half a million in 1938. Joshi gave special attention to the UP kisan movement and wrote about its political importance in the September 4, 1938 issue of *National Front*. The formation of the UP Kisan Committee in July 1937 was in line with the policy of United National Front leading the kisan workers through their own experience into the All India Kisan Sabha. Abolition of landlordism and modification of the Tenancy Bill in favour of the kisans were some of the issues taken up by the UPKC. Joshi wrote:

The Kisan had made the UP Congress the most Left Congress, the UP Congress Ministry the most advanced and created the most far-flung kisan movement than probably exists anywhere.⁹

Trade union membership also rose by 50 per cent in 1938 as compared to 1937. The AITUC came close to the

8 For details, see Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India*, op.cit., p. 340.

9 P.C. Joshi, "The UP Kisan Movement", *National Front*, September 4, 1938.

National Federation of Trade Unions (NFTU), holding a joint session in Nagpur in April 1938 though the trade union movement remained mostly under the Leftist leadership. There were strikes in various industrial sectors, thousands of workers joining the protest rallies.

The Communist Party opened an office in the commercial centre of Burra Bazar in Calcutta. It was a bold venture. But Joshi and Adhikari attended the office camouflaging as the business associates of Sardar Prithvi Singh. The party in Calcutta had no regular funds to meet the day-to-day expenses. The local comrades, the wholetimers, sustained themselves on tuitions and worked for the party voluntarily. Office expenses in Burra Bazar were taken care of by Sardar Prithvi Singh since he had some rich business contacts. Joshi often made trips to places outside Calcutta to collect funds from his relations.

The party had a production centre which brought out *The Communist* that carried articles on ideological issues and the party's political line on the implementation of the United Front tactics.

The 1937 elections brought the Congress to power in seven States where the Communists were released and they could enjoy relative freedom. It was decided to shift the party headquarters to Bombay which was among the seven States where the conditions were favourable for the party's growth. Dr Adhikari was sent there to make arrangements for bringing out a legal journal. H.D. Raja's *New Age* in Madras was taken over by S.V. Ghate on behalf of the party. This was the most crucial time for building the party. P.C. Joshi acted as the main party organiser, visited every province more than once each year and helped the growth of comrades who were to become the future leaders of the party and various mass organisations.

Joshi spent most of his time meeting other leaders of political parties to build up an anti-imperialist united front.

This was the time when Joshi visited Jayaprakash Narain for a long discussion. This was prior to the decision of the Congress Socialist Party to join hands with the Communists in a broad anti-imperialist united front.

The party headquarters having been shifted in early 1938 to Bombay, Joshi brought out from there a weekly journal *National Front* edited by him in order to carry forward the new political line. Govind Vidyarthi, an associate of Joshi working with him in the thirties and forties, recalled those days of activities in the office of the *National Front*.

It soon became the nerve-centre for guiding and coordinating the growing mass movements of workers, peasants, students and intellectuals. It also served as the open office of an illegal party. Joshi's unmatched ability as an organiser and his immeasurable capacity to work tirelessly for days together amazed all of us who were with him.¹⁰

The editorial board of this weekly journal consisted of P.C. Joshi, Ajoy Ghosh, R.D. Bharadwaj and Dr G. Adhikari. The journal was not only a medium for propagation of the party's ideas, but acted as a collective organiser. It soon gave an identity to the Communist Party of India.

Though the party was illegal, Joshi published the journal regularly from underground and made the position of the party clearer by stressing the importance of joining the national struggle thereby breaking its earlier isolation from mainstream politics. He tried to ensure the functioning of Communists as an effective political force in the national movement.

On April 17, 1938 the party brought out the draft thesis on the "National Congress and Working Class",

¹⁰ Govind Vidyarthi, "Remembering P.C. Joshi", *Mainstream*, November 15, 1980.

where it was said:

The Indian proletariat will not be able to fit itself for the task of the social emancipation of the toiling masses unless it participates in the political struggle which is waging in our country, unless it comes forward as the boldest champion of the democratic rights of the Indian people as a whole, unless it flings itself into the front rank of the struggle for freedom which is going on under the leadership of the National Congress—broadening and unifying it into the whole people's struggle against the rule of foreign imperialism.¹¹

This was the period when the Communists under Joshi's leadership made a sharp turn towards the path of national participation in the freedom struggle. The Draft Thesis on "The National Congress and the Working Class" mentioned:

It would not be possible for the Communists to become a political force in the country unless we make a decisive turn in our whole attitude towards the Indian National Congress, unless we become a decisive force inside the Congress itself, unifying the entire Left and its socialist core to implement the policy of building up the United National Front on the basis of the National Congress and of which policy we must forward as the most consistent and sincere champions. Not only must every one of us become a member of the Congress, but we must launch an intense campaign for the individual enrolment of workers en masse in the Congress.¹²

National Front was the first paper to propose through its editorial on October 16, 1938 that Subhas Bose, the candidate of the Left, must be re-elected as the Congress

11 *National Front*, April 17, 1938.

12 *National Front*, April 17, 1938.

President to lead the nation. The editorial said:

Communists, Congress Socialists, Royists, Left Congressmen are trying to come together to form a Left Block. During the election campaign, the Left Block must be put securely on its feet and embedded amongst the mass of Congressmen. In the situation of today, it is the Left which is most loyal to the programme of the Congress...¹³

Joshi hailed the victory of Subhas Bose as a significant triumph. He wrote in an editorial:

Subhas won because the rank and file of the Congress wanted him despite the mandate of the leadership... Subhas embodied all that the Congress had always stood for—unity of the whole nation, and its will to fight.¹⁴

In the Tripuri session of the Congress (1939), the CPI, though illegal, mobilised all its resources to get Subhas Chandra Bose re-elected as the Congress President. For the party it was a political battle.

The *National Front* turned out to be a serious journal that carried reports of movements of the working class, kisans, students as well as the State People's struggles. This journal was run without any financial support. In spite of his political and organisational work, Joshi spent a lot of time in collecting funds. He inspired young comrades like Shanta Gandhi, Nargis Batliwala, Dilshad Chari and many others to regularly participate in the drive for fund collection for the journal. Joshi had a special capacity to spot the best talent in every field and so he could locate the foremost political cartoonist of the time, R.S. Naidu, and photo-journalist, D.H. Tendulkar, who began to contribute in the journal which was thus enriched by their cartoons and

13 *National Front*, Editorial, October 16, 1938.

14 *National Front*, February 5, 1939.

photographs. He even went on sales squads—at any public meeting at Chowpatty or any hall by any political party, Joshi would be seen selling the latest issues of the *National Front*.

With the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, the provincial Congress governments resigned. Joshi had to go underground once again and, along with Dr Adhikari, he set up an underground network of dens to bring out party journals and literature and also to coordinate mass movements all over the country. During this period, he brought out the illegal journal of the party, *The Communist*, in cyclostyled form so that the comrades and the people at large would know about the party's position on various national and international issues.

This was quite a trying time for the party. Govind reminisced about those days:

We, who had been with him (Joshi) during this period, know with what willpower and tenacity and thorough organisational ability, he kept the party functioning throughout the country, along with building mass movements even when the front ranking leaders in many provinces were arrested and the party centre itself was under constant threat. It was due to his organisational genius that the party emerged after the ordeal as the largest single party in the country after the Indian National Congress.¹⁵

Joshi's indepth understanding of the prevailing situation transcended the confines of class struggle of the Meerut prison days to present long-term perspective of the proletariat's political participation in the national struggle for independence. Within a short span of three years—from 1937 to 1939—the Communist Party emerged as a small but significant Left force in India.

¹⁵ Govind Vidyarthi, *op. cit.*, *Mainstream*, November 15, 1980.

III

A MASS ORGANISER

P.C. Joshi as an organiser was almost unequalled, his ways of interaction were personal and persuasive, and that brought so many people close to him and the Communist Party. His contacts grew due, most of all, to his deep inner warmth, use of homely metaphor, his human approach which endeared him to a large number of people including writers, artists, students, intellectuals. His innate quality of searching for the new categories, blending thought with action, reconciling patriotism with internationalism, inspired a vast section of Indians to come forward and struggle for the country's freedom and at the same time fight against the age-old feudal values for a non-exploitative just society.

His leadership was the most brilliant chapter of the people's history of our country, not merely the party's history. He initiated an allround political movement of a new sort through the medium of culture and art, rooted in our folk tradition. In the vortex of the anti-fascist and anti-imperialist struggles, he united the isolated cultural groups which had emerged in different parts of the country—in Bengal, Kerala, Andhra, Punjab—to develop into a mass cultural upsurge. This brought a new wave of progressive ethos that engulfed a whole generation of people of that

period. His Marxist approach was not rigid and sectarian; it acquired a new meaning with his ability to relate different problems to Indian tradition. His was a period, the most difficult era, full of complexities, springing mainly from the international situation. And in this setting, he carried out the Herculean task of bringing the Communists out of their political isolation and helping them merge into the national movement. He carved out a distinct category for the Communists as national patriots, though they were occasionally misunderstood by the other brands of nationalists, and also as torchbearers of a new kind of people-oriented cultural ethos; and precisely here Joshi's contribution in turning the Communist Party into a mass political organisation was undoubtedly enormous.

Joshi nurtured the mass organisations emphasising on their non-party and non-sectarian character and giving them a broad perspective so as to enable more and more people to come closer to the movement. This was the time when major mass fronts other than the existing AITUC and AIKS, took a distinct shape. The mass fronts of students, artists, writers and women worked as meeting grounds of Communists with non-communist, progressive and patriotic forces. Joshi had a clear understanding of the role the Communist members would play in these mass fronts. His primary objective was to broaden the front and bring in sympathisers who would help in running those fronts and ideologically come closer to the Communists. There used to be a distinct category of 'sympathisers' in every family of a party comrade who were drawn close, and yet were not members of the party as such. They were of great help in times of crises, often helping the party with financial contributions or providing shelters to leaders whenever required during the illegal periods of the party or at other hard times.

Joshi always spoke in the idiom of the people and could

instantaneously establish a rapport with the non-party members of any comrade's family—mothers, in-laws, sisters, relatives of any joint family who would soon feel the need to do something for those self-effacing bunch of Communists. Joshi infused in the minds of comrades as well as sympathisers an intense sense of pride in the organisation. That has been his major contribution as a mass organiser. His simplicity, sincerity, the innocent smile of his *pahari* face had the magnetic power to attract people. His ways were on a one-to-one basis. On the first meeting with any individual, he could impress upon the person with his volley of questions—on his personal background, family problems etc. He spoke so fast that the words came out of his mouth like a torrent, and it was at times difficult to understand them. He would directly talk about society, politics and nation, sharing his ideas about the country's freedom movement or a classless society. When Govind Vidyarthi first met Joshi, he wrote:

Personally it was an intensely personal experience. I found a person in whose hands I could place myself without reserve—a strange mixture of affection and dedication.¹

And that was precisely what Joshi was meant to be for many of his erstwhile comrades. In fact, a whole generation of that period—many among whom are not alive today—looked upon him with high esteem. He built up a movement, a mass organisation and a band of dedicated Communist patriots.

In the early forties, when Communists were denigrated as traitors for not joining the 'Quit India' movement, Joshi directed the party to plunge heart and soul into relief work during the Great Bengal Famine of 1943 that saw 35 lakhs of people perishing on the streets of Calcutta. Lorryloads of dead bodies, heart rending cries of women begging for a

¹ *Mainstream*, November 15, 1980 after Joshi's death.

bowl of rice water, hunting for a morsel of food from the garbage cans or the sight of famished and emaciated women and children gasping for their last breath had shaken the minds of the people of our country. In 1943, about one crore people, mainly agricultural labourers, sharecroppers, poor peasants and urban poor, were displaced and thrown on the streets by this famine. Thirty lakhs lost their earnings, fifteen per cent of peasants became landless. Destitute women were pushed into brothels. The number of prostitutes increased from 20,000 to over 45,000. The American GIs, stationed in Calcutta, were kidnapping and molesting young Bengali girls by entering their houses and forcibly taking them away. Realising the gravity of the situation, Joshi wrote to the American Consul in Calcutta and asked the Communist Party of Bengal to intervene in the matter and urgently fight the menace.

This was the time when destitute famine-stricken famished women were lured with money, sexually exploited, sent to military camps or forced into prostitution. For that very reason, the Communist women set up the Mahila Atma Raksha Samiti (MARS) to protect such victims. *Atma-raksha* (self-defence) was linked to the name of the organisation. This mass front of Communist women brought within its fold many non-Communist and well known liberal women like Rani Mahalanobis and Leela Mazumdar. Indira Devi Chaudhurani, a niece of Rabindranath Tagore, became its first President.

Several Communist women acknowledged Joshi for educating them to build up the women's movement as a "militant contingent in the struggle for a free India emancipated from the shackles of poverty, ignorance and degeneration".² His unfailing enthusiasm to bring women

into mass movements, into creative work, party work helped the Communist women realise the imperative need for broad fronts in their own and national interest. Joshi played a major role in shaping and giving a proper orientation to the women's movement. A woman leader of that period, Manikuntala Sen, wrote in her memoirs about P.C. Joshi's teachings to the Communist women. Their work was confined to low-income *basti* areas:

The person who first showed us how to do this kind of work was P.C. Joshi, the then party leader. In order to fight for the special rights of women, we would have to organise all women save those belonging to the uppermost rungs of society. Women would participate in the freedom movement with all the others. They would be pioneers in the fields of class struggle. Women would have to be organised for constructive work. The priority would be the welfare of women and children. Other struggles would continue side by side: anti-fascist campaign and the movement for release of political prisoners. These were some of the things that P.C. Joshi taught us.³

Joshi was able to comprehend the nature of the calamity that had struck Bengal; and he thus geared the party and its mass front to organise a countrywide movement "*Bhookha Hai Bangal*" (Hunger Stalks Bengal). He toured Bengal along with a cultural squad, rousing the people against the Japanese fascists, against the hoarders and blackmarketeers and for our country's freedom, for Hindu-Muslim unity. On his way to Midnapore, a district in Bengal, Joshi could see the ghastly sight of more than five hundred human skulls of poor peasants who had died in famine. Joshi toured the villages of Bengal, organised public meetings to make the people aware of the man-made nature of the famine,

² See Renu Chakravarty, *Communists in Indian Women's Movement*, PPH, New Delhi, 1980.

³ Manikuntala Sen, *In Search of Freedom: An Unfinished Journey*, Stree, Calcutta, 2001, p. 95.

build movements for relief as well as dehoarding; and through this entire process he helped revitalise the party. He wrote a pamphlet *Who Lives if Bengal Dies?*. Through this he exposed the politics and games of the hoarders and the misery of the landless labourers and sharecroppers. In this moving pamphlet he forcefully appealed to the people at large to do everything possible to save Bengal. Joshi spent six weeks in famine-ravaged Bengal, travelled extensively in the affected areas and, thereby, was able to get a clearer picture of the situation and the tragedy that had struck the province. He wrote:

I left Bengal with only one determination, how to make every Indian patriot forget all differences and get together to organise maximum help for Bengal, how to make every man, woman and child pay, pay and pay for Bengal till he has not a copper left to spare...⁴

Joshi brought the misery of Bengal on the party's agenda and more importantly on the nation's agenda. Bengal was in the throes of death and Joshi made Bengal the concern of all. The nationwide movement to save Bengal, to raise funds for Bengal through the cultural squads had a profound impact across the country. It was through that movement that art became a vehicle, a medium for political struggle. Songs, dances, plays, paintings, sketches could work wonders. What speeches failed to do was done through the medium of culture—it was this which united the mass fronts on a common platform to expose the food crisis, to fight against hoarding, to initiate rationing, to open relief kitchen. It was a different India which came to the aid of Bengal. Joshi wrote:

Bengal must not die for the sake of India and every single Indians.

4 P.C. Joshi, *Who Lives if Bengal Dies?*, PPH, Bombay, 1943, p. 10.

If we love our family and do not want it to go to pieces like Bengal's families, we must help Bengal.

If we desire to save the honour of our wives and sisters and not lose it like Bengal's wives and sisters, we must help Bengal.

If we want our children not to die like flies as Bengal's children are dying, we must help Bengal.

If we love India, we must save Bengal. If Bengal dies India cannot live.

These words electrified the whole country. While exposing the failure of the Muslim League Ministry to arrest the hoarders, Joshi gave a call to build a self-help movement inside Bengal and appealed to the deep humanity and ardent patriotism of every individual in other parts of the country already bestirred by the Bengal tragedy to extend all possible assistance to the starving people ravaged by the famine.

He specified the twin tasks of the party thus—'organise a self-help movement to be able to continue, improve and enlarge the relief kitchens' (party comrades had been working in 700 kitchens and feeding 1,17,000 famine-stricken destitutes); and 'organise the battle for the *aman* crop, win Bengal's harvest for the people of Bengal, and ensure that it does not go to the hoarder as it did last year'.

Joshi's holistic political understanding enabled him link the menacing food crisis of Bengal with the national questions of the time. He was able to comprehend the urgency of forming a National Government which could eliminate the effects of the famine in the province.

The best Ministry for Bengal in the present situation will be a League-Mahasabha Ministry actually supported by the Congress and the Communists. It is the task of every honest patriot inside Bengal to make the League Ministry offer genuine co-operation to Dr Shyamaprosad, on the one hand, and get him to accept it, on the other.⁵

5 *Ibid.*, p. 22.

One major contribution of Joshi in the creative field was the setting up of a Central Cultural Squad which became a rallying point for artistes, playwrights, musicians, dancers and photographers. The Cultural Squad, with its songs on freedom, patriotism, hunger as well as a play on the Bengal famine, toured the entire country. The campaign through this Cultural Squad helped the Party reach out to the masses, particularly at a time when it was isolated from the national movement because of its approach to the World War against fascism that it regarded as People's War.* Benoy Roy was in charge of the music choir and Shombhu Mitra, who subsequently became the legendary dramatist and playwright of Bengal, was given the responsibility of preparing the play. He chose Bijon Bhattacharya's *Jabanbandi*, which was translated by Nemi Chand Jain into Hindi titled *Antim Abhilasha*, to be staged outside Bengal in other parts of the country. Where the Squad performed, the people at the end donated generously for the Bengal Famine relief. *People's War*, the weekly organ of the Communist Party, was full of articles, stories, reports on the famine, along with moving and heartrending photographs of such photographers as Sunil Janah as well as sketches of Chittaprosad with his detailed on-the-spot reports. Reading such articles written by Hajrah Begum on the Bengal Famine, a reader, who later worked among working class women, wrote to her:

I see your articles in *People's War* about the Bengal Famine and my heart breaks to read the suffering of my people. This money my husband gave for a Puja Saree. I have plenty of sarees and do not need a new one. Please send the money to Bengal."⁶

* Details of the political line during that period will be in the next chapter.

⁶ *People's War*, July 1, 1945.

That was the kind of emotion engendered by the party's campaign. The Cultural Squad toured Gujarat, Maharashtra collecting funds for the relief of the famine victims.*

This *Bhookha Hai Bangal* movement electrified the entire nation. Culture and art became the medium to spread political messages to the people. The success of this campaign strengthened Joshi's perception of art as a medium of political struggle. In the Cultural Squad he picked up young men and women with talent from various parts of the country and inspired them to do something for the people at large. Among the teachers were Shanti Vardhan, Ravi Shankar, Abani Dasgupta, Shachin Shankar, Narendra Sharma who later sparkled as artistes and made a name for themselves in the field of culture. The members of the Central Squad experimented with various forms of folk and classical style. There was an upsurge for the revival of folk arts, mass singing and open-air stage performances. Joshi often used to come and see the rehearsals; his very presence encouraged the budding talents to grow. Joshi found talent in everybody in some form or the other and this he utilised for the good of the party and the country. He could instil confidence in them, inspiring them to prove their best. Many women, even from orthodox background, came out of their private domains and became part of the social transformation that was going on through this cultural movement.

In May 1943, the Cultural Squad took an organisational shape with the formation of the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA) which coordinated all the progressive trends which had so far manifested in the form of drama,

* The People's Publishing House, set up by the party, brought out 22 unique black-and-white sketches with authentic eyewitness account of the famine by Chittaprosad, entitled *Hungry Bengal: A Tour through Midnapore District in November 1943*.

songs and dances. Joshi had the vision to tap the rich cultural heritage of our country and integrate it with the most significant aspects of our people's lives and aspirations in that period. The IPTA turned into a cultural movement which sought to make people's art an expression of a new spirit. Old art forms blended with new vibrant themes. Traditional dances like Kathakali that remained within the four walls of temples and palaces became living art forms as the democratic movements of the peasantry and working class brought them out of their isolation and made them the reflection of the people's prevailing revolutionary mood. Art, music, dance and theatre began to express the people's struggles for freedom, economic justice and progressive culture. The IPTA stood for the defence of the anti-feudal ethos which was also directed against imperialism and fascism. It acted as a catalyst for enlightening the masses about the causes and solutions of the problems facing them. There was spontaneous response from the kisans, workers, students and women who through songs, recitation of poems, dances, and enactment of plays roused the people to act against the food hoarders, campaign for the release of national leaders, demand a national government while making them aware of the danger of fascism. These four issues were welded together and soon the local efforts merged into a nationwide people's theatre movement. This was indeed the brainchild of P.C. Joshi. He felt the imperative need to use the art form through creative contacts with the life of the Indian people to make them conscious of the socio-political conditions around them.

The IPTA's Bombay Conference, held on January 8, 1945, was a landmark event. The thrust was to connect art with the life of the people. The highlight of the cultural evening was the ballet called the *Spirit of India*. It was textured with *katha*-like commentary in verse composed by Prem Dhawan, the haunting melody of Benoy Roy and the

ballet choreographed by Shanti Vardhan. It unveiled on the stage the misery of the people suppressed under foreign imperialism, medieval feudalism and emerging industrial capitalism. Apart from this epic drama, there were other performances such as a Konkani play, *Barakatha*—the folk form of Andhra, *Tamasha*—the popular form of entertainment of countryside Maharashtra, a Gujarati play *Mrichhakatik* (Toycart) and children's songs.

Then there was a Hindustani play *Zubaidah* by Ahmed Abbas, magnificently directed by Balraj Sahni. Joshi was immensely moved by this play. He wrote:

If the IPTA can put up more plays like *Zubaidah*, I will not miss anyone of them and I am sure the whole patriotic Bombay will come up and fill up the Hall.⁷

Thereafter he mentioned an anecdote that revealed the kind of magnanimity Joshi as a person had. Referring to the story line, he continued:

The hero comes back on leave only to find *Zubaidah* dying, struck down by cholera. The funeral scene stirred the entire audience when the Congress, League and the Red Flags were placed one after another over the body. I saw Dr Mahmud, who was sitting along side, wiping his tears and when the end came with Iqbal's *Hindustan Hamara*, he said: 'You young men are doing what we failed to do in our time. You have my best wishes.' And when I told him that we were able to do what he was so proud because of what he and his generation did in the past, he was visibly moved.⁸

This is how Joshi could interact with people of different politics and impress upon them. Similarly, the major theatre production of a four-act Bengali play by Bijon Bhattacharya

⁷ *People's War*, January 21, 1945.

⁸ *Ibid.*

was another milestone in the history of the IPTA. It was *Nabanna*, the New Harvest, in which the contemporary life of the Bengal peasantry and their misery since the Bengal famine figured with a large number of characters and a wide variety of scenes. Dramas became collective performances of writer, actor, director, audience all together creating the play.

The live-wire contacts of this movement were the trade unions, kisan sabhas and also the Progressive Writers' Association. The sponsors of the latter movement included all shades of political opinion—Congressmen, Communists, Socialists, moderates, liberals, labour and kisan leaders. Jawaharlal Nehru, in a message to the Association, said:

I am greatly interested in the development of a People's Theatre in India. I think there is great room for it provided it is based on the people and their traditions. Otherwise, it is likely to function in the air. I am glad to notice from your circular that you are laying stress on the People's approach. In China and Spain they had that atmosphere; in India it is still lacking. Nevertheless, I think an effort should be made in this direction and I wish your Association every success in this work.⁹

Preparations for the All India Kisan Conference started at Bhakra and that compelled the IPTA to go in search of peasant talents. Within a fortnight, it could mobilise actors and writers for six plays, of which three were written and produced by the people of the towns and three long ones written and produced by village people. These collective endeavours could bring all sections of the people together.

Joshi's approach towards culture was not a rejection of the past but its assimilation with the existing problems

⁹ Indian People's Theatre Association, Bulletin No. 1, July 1943, Bombay, p. 14.

of the people. He taught the young people how to comprehend history, culture, tradition built up by the people and connect them to the problems and issues of the toiling masses. His interest in folk culture, folk songs and folk art stemmed from his concern about the ordinary people. He could inspire every comrade with a sense of being in the stream of history.

If one understands Joshi's broad vision and imagination, it is clear that the IPTA's foundation and the holding of the First Congress of the Communist Party around the same time was not a coincidence: one supplemented the other. The First Party Congress took place in Bombay from May 23 to June 1, 1943, while the First Conference of the IPTA also took place in Bombay on May 25, 1943. The Party Congress was attended by a large number of comrades from all over the country. P.C. Joshi submitted his political and organisational report. It was the time of the War; the danger of Fascism, both from the West and the East, loomed large. The Indian National Congress under Gandhiji's leadership had launched the 'Quit India' movement with the slogan 'Do or Die'. The party's position was different: it did not join the movement as it considered the War a People's War after the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union. That was why it was a highly complex situation posing a major challenge to the General Secretary. The party's immediate task was to educate the people and make them politically aware of the complexities of the situation. Joshi was at the height of his popularity at that time, he proved himself to be a great organiser, and the builder of many mass fronts. Though politically the Communists suffered an isolation from the national mainstream by keeping away from the 'Quit India' movement, Joshi succeeded in bringing a large section of prolific writers and artistes into either the party or its periphery convincing them of the party's political position even at that critical time.

The great Buddhist scholar Rahul Sankrityayan, author of the famous book *Volga to Ganga*, became a member of the Communist Party and stayed in the party headquarters for quite sometime. Poets Vallathol of Kerala, Makhdoom Mohiuddin of Hyderabad, Bishnu Dey of Bengal as well as Benoy Roy, Shachin Shankar, Prem Dhawan, Kaifi Azmi, Ali Sardar Jafri, Sajjad Zaheer, Chittaprosad were a few of the galaxy of creative personalities who came to the party to serve the people convinced as they were then about the correctness of the party's political line.

Despite the prevailing complex political situation all around the party went on growing as a vital creative political force. The membership had more than doubled by March 1943—there were 9,219 full members and 8,816 auxiliary or candidate members; of these full members, 2,000 were the party's whole-time workers. There were 1,97,629 workers in the CPI-affiliated trade unions; similarly 2,81,109 kisans in the Kisan Sabhas; 25,822 women in the Mahila Sangham (Andhra) or Mahila Atma Raksha Samiti (Bengal); 6400 children in 190 Bal Sanghas. The sale of *People's War* had increased by 124 per cent. It came out in five languages besides provincial organs in six more languages. Over 65,000 copies of the party organs were produced in 11 languages; 26 pamphlets in 42,500 copies were printed and of these 92.5 per cent were already sold out.¹⁰ All this explains the growing acceptance by the Indian people of the party's policies and also the fact that the party comrades were being increasingly regarded as the best patriotic organisers.

The First Party Congress also became a great cultural event. Cultural groups from the various provinces with their distinct identities came, performed and created an atmosphere of festivity. Joshi took charge of the party as its

General Secretary in 1936 and by 1943 he could make the CPI a national political organisation. There is no second opinion that Joshi could build up the CPI as a mass political party, steering it through cataclysmic events of the War period. He could break the political isolation by involving the party in relief and rehabilitation work, running kitchen in the famine-stricken rural areas of Bengal, building roads and making irrigation facilities, organising cooperatives for artisans, campaigning for rationing of food. Without the national perspective of P.C. Joshi and his leadership, this would not have been possible.

Those who saw P.C. Joshi from close quarters during that period spoke highly about him. Recalling those days, Subrata Banerjee observed:

He had a wonderful ability to draw people to him and throw them into Party work. That is why leading intellectuals, poets, writers, painters and performing artistes of those days came close to the party. We drew great strength from this association in the days of People's War, when we were virtually isolated from the mainstream of the national struggle for freedom.

Joshi had a special ability to assess and evaluate the kind of work a comrade or a sympathiser was best able to do. He utilised the talents of each one of them and involved them in party work. It is interesting to know how P.C. Joshi picked up talented young people from various parts of the country. Chittaprosad, the budding artist, was first spotted by the party comrades in Chittagong during the war period. Chitta had no links or connections with the party. He used to draw posters and paste them at vantage points in the port city. Bhowani Sen, the Secretary of the Bengal party, got a bunch of his posters which were something new both in content and style. He sent them to P.C. Joshi in Bombay. Prompt came the instruction—"catch Chitta and pack him

¹⁰ *People's War*, March 7, 1943.

off to Bombay."¹¹ Before his arrival, Govind Vidyarthi was told to display his posters on the winding railings of the staircase in the party headquarters. Chitta arrived in Bombay a short while before the Bezwada Kisan Conference. It was during that time that another talent, Sunil Janah, the photographer, was discovered in Calcutta and sent to Bombay. Chitta's sketches and linocuts and Sunil's photographs were a superb combination. The sketches of the Bengal Famine and posters and photographs of peasants, workers, women became a golden treasure for *People's War* and *People's Age*. That was the golden era of the communist movement in spite of the fact that many outside the party felt that its political line was anti-national and within the party a few started a whispering campaign accusing Joshi of social reformism. However, for most of the comrades, he remained the guiding spirit.

It was not a minor issue that the Kayyur martyrs' last wish was to meet their leader P.C. Joshi before they were hanged to death. On March 23, 1943, four young peasants of Malabar in their twenties, who were members of the Communist Party, were hanged in Cannanore jail. The background of the case was as follows: the militant kisan movement against landlordism was organised by the Communists working within the Congress Socialist Party in the late thirties. The British repression on the peasantry increased with the advent of the War. On March 28, 1941 a Kisan Sabha procession was organised to protest against the police attack on Kayyur village. A police constable misbehaved with a Muslim peasant woman and as a consequence there was a clash in which the constable was killed. Sixty persons faced trial and finally four young men—Kunhambu, Chirukandan, Appu and Abubaker—

were sentenced to death. As they expressed their desire to see their leader P.C. Joshi before mounting the gallows, Joshi went to Kerala and met those Kayyur heroes and also their mothers. Joshi was emotionally moved beyond measure at the sacrifice and heroism of those young comrades and wrote an extraordinary article in the party organ *People's War* on April 11, 1943:

Flowers of Humanity that can Never Perish Kayyur Heroes on the Eve of Execution

... They neither understood English nor Hindi and I could not talk Malayalam. With the jailor's permission P. Krishna Pillai translated to me sentence by sentence. The flood of tears over my cheeks made the flow of words out of the mouth possible or I would have just got choked up and collapsed. This is the substance of what I told them on behalf of the party.

The Party is proud of you four than it is of any of its members. You came to us when we were in mere hundreds. Today we are over 9000 party members and 8000 candidate members. All 17,000 of us vow to you that we will hold high the banner you held so worthily and continue fighting the battle you fought so heroically.

You are dying for an immortal cause, of freedom and prosperity for our country and the whole world. Ours is the cause of justice, it must triumph, and you are giving your lives to see that it shall triumph. We know you are fulfilling your dreams, not dying.

You, our beloved four, are being lost to the party. But it is the work and an example of comrades like you that have made the party what it is today. When you joined the party in Malabar, it was a group of young patriots. Today we are the major political party in your province. All over the country the best sons of the people are joining the party. Wherever the party is known, your names are uttered with love and veneration. Patriotic young men and women consider it an honour to join the party, because it bred young martyrs like you.

¹¹ Ganesh Shukla, Unpublished Manuscript "CPI: An Insider's View", p. 207.

The party is losing you but gaining four martyrs. Let them send you four to the gallows that we can't help today. But inspired by you four, we will win 400, 4000...new party members.

This, the party can't prevent, this we will work for. And rest assured, comrades, we will win. As our cause is immortal, so is its instrument, our party. Persecution never weakened but only strengthened us. Your martyrdom not only brings glory but strength to the party. No Communist can desire a better end.

You are being lost to your families, we know. When you joined the party, you accepted the people as your parents and worked to see that no Indian father or mother suffers your own did ... Rest assured, comrades, that we, all the 17,000 of us, will look after your families as our own. We will do all we can to make your parents feel that the party is their family, every party member their son.

To get the chance to meet you has been the greatest day of my life and I bring you greetings from the party you love more than your life. I am going to your village from here and will meet your families. Is there any message for them?"

"Back them up. Ask them not to worry," all of them said together.

"Anything else?" I asked.

"You have already said all that was welling up inside us," one of them said. The jailor saheb began looking at his wrist watch. I asked them to hurry up.

Kunhambu, who was in the first cell, began. "The party made me capable of doing whatever I did for the people. If the party thinks I have done my duty that is all I ever desired."

Appu said: "You have brought great news of the growing strength of the party. We will now mount the gallows with added strength. We joined the party to fight and die for the freedom of the country."

Chirukandan said: "We are only four kisan sons. But India has millions of kisans. We can be hanged but they can't be destroyed. This is what has sustained us all through. Those

letters from all over the country make us feel sorry that we can't live longer to serve them. We have known no other regret. If we had more lives we would have died over and over again for our cause."

Abubaker was in the last cell. He said: "We have drawn inspiration from the lives of our martyrs. We never dreamt that we will share the honour of being one of them. Tell all the comrades that we will mount the gallows fearlessly. My mother is very old. Cheer her up. My brothers are very young. Educate them for party work. I was the oldest member of the family. They have nobody left to look after them."

The moment he stopped, the jailor said the time was up. I asked him permission to shake hands with them. He agreed...

The Kayyur martyrs had embraced the gallows with the words "P.C. Joshi Zindabad" alongside "Communist Party Zindabad" on their lips. Their heroism was immortalised in the songs composed by party comrades-*Kayyur Bandhure....*, sung in all languages.

Joshi gave a lot of importance to building the kisan front. Bengal was devastated by the famine and that is why it was chosen as the venue of the Ninth Session of the All India Kisan Sabha. The Conference took place in Netrakona, a Hajang belt of the Mymensingh district. Joshi in his appeal to the delegates urged them to devote their entire energy to build Kisan Sabhas as he knew that one-third of the strength of the Communist Party came from the peasantry. They comprised the largest percentage of Hindus and Muslims together, and the largest percentage of the downtrodden people of the country. Joshi was visibly moved by the large participation of kisan women at the conference. He said:

... In no session of the Congress and the League will you find women in such large numbers. One in every ten present here is a woman. When the kisan movement has

been able to rouse even the backward women of the village, no power on the earth can crush it; it will be victorious."¹²

There was, however, some unpleasantness as is evident from a report by a woman journalist in *People's War*. She was annoyed at the manner in which the middle-class women had been behaving, talking among themselves and not listening to the speeches. When this reporter complained this to Joshi, he retorted and defended those women. The report continues:

Joshi said: 'Is it not a great thing that such a large number of *bhadralok* women have come out of their homes, are sitting on bare ground and that too with peasant and Hajang women? Have such things ever happened in Bengal's national life? Our speeches are not simple and direct enough. That is why they begin talking to each other rather than listening. Wait for the cultural programme and then you will see how intensely they listen.'¹³

In fact, Joshi publicly glorified the Hajang women who would not leave when it began to drizzle, till the leaders from the dais ordered them to go away. Hajang women went by turns and helped to cut the vegetables to prepare the meals. The reporter saw an aged Hajang woman, about 80 years old, washing her bleeding feet in the river and asked her: "Why have you taken the trouble to come all this way at your age?" She responded: "What! for the last three months all the boys of the village have been collecting rice, bamboo etc. for this *sammelan* and I have been hearing nothing else but Netrokona, Netrokona and Netrokona. And you mean to say I should not have come! ... Could I get a better place to die, with

¹² *People's War*, May 6, 1945.

¹³ *People's War*, May 13, 1945.

thousands of our own people around me?"¹⁴

Delegates came from all over India; nearly a lakh of people gathered. Bankim Mukherjee, Abdullah Rasul, Parulekar, P. Sundarayya, Muzaffar Ahmed, Bhowani Sen were some of the leaders of the kisan movement who were on the dais. Delegates and visitors came in buses and trains, with some even sitting on the top of the trains. The Conference showed the immense popularity of Joshi and the party. An old peasant was overwhelmed by Joshi's speech. He said:

Joshi is a great man and how is it that he talks of things we can all understand? I had thought he would talk high politics which we peasants would not be able to understand. And tell me, he is not a Bengali, how is it that he knows all that is happening in our villages, every word of what he said about the hoarder is true? If we could only do what he asked us to do, our misery would really be a thing of the past.¹⁵

After the end of the Second World War, the announcement of the forthcoming election to be held was made on August 21, 1945. Wavell assured on September 19 the possibility of a full self-government though the word independence was missing. Political parties were geared to the campaign process for the election. Joshi drafted his blueprint of the election programme and laid down the perspective of the campaign for the comrades. He wrote on October 7, 1945 that the Communist Party would not blame other parties but tell the people the simple truth:

India's main parties by fighting each other will not bring Indian freedom nearer, but only leave India in the hands of the British imperialists as the final arbitrators of its destiny.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*—a report 'Among Kisan Women'.

¹⁵ *People's War*, May 6, 1945.

Joshi covered the length and breadth of the country on his election tour. His main purpose was to put forward the political position of the party and establish contact with the masses. In Bengal, he toured the districts of Midnapore, Jessore, Dhaka, Mymensingh and Chittagong. There were meetings on the Assam border at Susang, the peasant stronghold of the party. Wherever he went, his meetings attracted a large number of peasants, both Hindus and Muslims. He put across the party's policy, the patriotic role it had played by selflessly serving the people during the famine and campaigning against the hoarders.

From Bengal Joshi toured Bihar and held meetings at Patna, Mungher, Lakhisarai and Begusarai. Here he had to face a hostile crowd, the situation was different from that of Bengal. His meetings were attacked. At one railway station Joshi was attacked by a mob shouting such slogans as "*Communist Party murdabad*", "*P.C. Joshi murdabad*", "*Communist Party gaddar hai*". It was one Sikh comrade with a sword who chased the attackers and saved Joshi. Bihar was the most difficult of all the provinces. Perhaps, the greatest resistance to the party came from there.

Joshi's election rally at a kisan gathering at Sheikhpura in Bihar was the only silver-lining in the otherwise cloudy scenario. He gave a call to fight the zamindars, mahajans, hoarders who were British agents inside the village. Joshi was not an orator, his speeches lacked demagogy, they were in dialogue form. Peasants lined up village by village holding proudly the red banner in one hand and raised the other hand to give a salute with a clenched fist. Hundreds of kisans would not allow Joshi to go without giving him their red salute. Joshi moved from group to group, took their salute and chatted with them; it was only then that the kisans marched back beating their village drums and blowing their bugles.¹⁶

¹⁶ *People's Age*, March 3, 1946.

In UP, Joshi attended meetings in the working class areas at Allahabad, Lucknow and Kanpur. From there he proceeded to Andhra. There had been widespread slander campaigns against the party. Party comrades were physically assaulted and the party offices all over the country were attacked. The party journals could not be hawked or sold in open places—they were either snatched away or burnt. The kisan conference in Tamil Nadu was attacked, the pandal was set on fire, workers were stabbed and the Red Flag was burnt.

These planned attacks by opponents or other political parties compelled the leaders to think more about the party's strategy to combat the situation. Joshi asked comrades to print handbills containing the truth and refuting the lies and allegations and distribute them on a mass scale. He wrote in strong words against such goondaism:

Whenever our comrades are attacked singly or in groups, they must defend themselves with courage and call upon the common people around to come and help and see for themselves who is who. Our girl comrades must defend their honour with their own tongue and their own fists as they would against any slanderer and ruffian.

Every comrade must put up a stout defence whatever the circumstances, however heavy the odds, whatever the locality. On no account shall we plan to carry out any counter-attacks whatever the provocations.¹⁷

In spite of these attacks and slander campaigns against the Communists branding them as traitors for their non-participation in the 'Quit India' movement, the mass struggles under the party's leadership against feudal oppression continued unabated in various parts of the country. One such struggle was of the Worli tribals in Maharashtra led by Godavaribai Parulekar who was affectionately called Bai. She fought the slavery inflicted

¹⁷ *People's War*, November 4, 1945.

upon the primitive adivasis living in the Umbergaon, Dahanu and Palghar talukas of Thane district of Maharashtra. The torture on them by the landlords was extremely harsh; the wives of the tenants were treated as personal property to be used and enjoyed by the landlords. The decision to initiate the movement was taken at Titwalla in Thane district in 1945. The Worlis were inspired by the slogan "Down with Forced Labour" which they heard for the first time. Godavaribai started working among them in the hills and forests, staying with them with the sole determination of freeing them from the oppressive forced labour. Finally, the great uprising of the Worlis took place and continued from 1945 to 1947.¹⁸

In spite of the externment order on Godavaribai and later her arrest on false charges of making incendiary speeches in February 1947 and the subsequent despatch of the army, the struggle of the Worlis triumphed and forced the government to retreat. The army was called back and on April 5, 1947; adivasi Worlis were freed from serfdom, forced marriage and other forms of exploitation. Communists like Godavaribai, who were totally dedicated to the cause of the downtrodden, were the products of that very period.

Likewise, on the eastern side of the country another kisan upsurge hit 19 districts of Bengal. It was the Tebhaga movement for the rights of the sharecroppers, led by the Communist Party. It was called the Tebhaga movement because it fought for the demand that tillers should get two-thirds of the crop and only one-third would go to the landlord. *Tebhaga* literally means two-thirds. Peasant men and women took part in large numbers, faced lathis and guns; their battle-cry was: 'We will give our lives but not our paddy'. In spite of the harsh police repression of the

Suhrawardy Government, the struggle continued for one year. The then government finally accepted the legitimacy of the claim of the peasants and the bill for the abolition of the zamindari system was drafted but not tabled in the Assembly because of the pressure of the landlords. The government's Land Revenue Commissioner's report referred to the misery of the kisans following the Bengal famine: "Fiftyseven lakhs of the 75 lakh kisan families were living from hand to mouth." The peasants had to deposit the crop in the landlord's granary and they suffered from extortions of various kinds. The prices went up exorbitantly in the aftermath of the famine and that also severely hit the sharecroppers and their families. The peasant movement in the forties helped rouse awareness among the peasants who actively participated in the campaign to dehoard the crop from the granaries of the *jotedars* and sell it at controlled rates to the poor. The Tebhaga movement thus grew out of the experience of the food crisis of the famine period and also from the peasants' growing consciousness about the feudal exploitation.

The CPI also played a historic role in the Telangana struggle. The party correctly understood the intrigue of the Nizam of Hyderabad who had been conspiring with the British for his state to be recognised as an independent Princely State, as he was not ready to amalgamate it with the Indian Union. Hyderabad was the largest of all the Princely States with forty per cent of the area being under large feudal estates. Exorbitant rent from the peasants, forced labour, illegal extractions, beatings and killings were some of the worst forms of oppression and exploitation practised there. A massive session of the All India Kisan Conference, held at Bezwada in April 1944 came out with a protest programme in defence of the people. The Communist Party called upon the AITUC, All-Hyderabad Students' Union and women to join the struggle. In 1945, the people revolted

¹⁸ For details see Renu Chakravartty, *op. cit.*, pp. 162-169.

against forced levy. The Nizam's armed forces and his Razakar gangs were fought through armed resistance. The aim was to end the rule of the Nizam forever. It was a long battle; village after village joined the struggle. This was the time when the Andhra Mahila Sangam grew into a formidable mass organisation. However, even before that, in September 1943, special training camps had been set up to train women.¹⁹ Ganesh Shukla in his memoirs observed: Joshi was the initial inspiration behind the Telangana armed struggle. He had built an elaborate network for supply of arms and ammunitions from different parts of the country. In this he had the support of many military officers who gifted weapons free and arranged for their shipment to Telangana. Except Joshi and Adhikari no other leader had any concrete idea of this secret operation.²⁰

The armed struggle continued till the end of 1951. Nizam had to finally surrender.

This was the period when many heroic battles were fought in defence of the workers' rights projecting the demand for increase in wages under the leadership of the AITUC. The strike of workers in the iron and steel factory in Calcutta in protest against mass retrenchment, strikes in the jute mills in Howrah and Hooghly, the strike in Kolar Goldfields in January 1946, the great all India postal strike on July 29, 1946, the Madras Corporation workers' strike in August 1946, the Southern Railways strike by 40,000 workers in August-September 1946, the textile workers' strike in Coimbatore in November 1946 were some of those trade union battles initiated by the Communist Party. The total number of strikes during the year 1947 was 1811 and 18 lakh workers participated in these trade union actions.

19 For details see Renu Chakravartty, *op. cit.*, pp. 138-139.

20 Ganesh Shukla, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

The country was shaken by the Great Naval Mutiny in Bombay in February 1946. The Communist comrades within the Royal Indian Navy organised this mutiny against the British. The Indian naval personnel revolted against the British officers. As many as 20,000 naval ratings in all the 12 shore establishments in Bombay and its suburbs with 20 ships in harbour went on a lightning strike.

Congress, Muslim League and Communist Party flags were quickly stitched in hundreds and clandestinely sent to the ships with instructions that all the three flags should be hoisted on the mast of every ship. Flags went up in the night. This precautionary measure was taken to ensure unity of all the parties and communities in support of the mutineers. Similarly, all the three flags went up on many buildings, tree tops and electric poles facing the dock.²¹

The people of Bombay stood by the mutineers—there was a spontaneous *hartal*. Bombay city was rocked by the indiscriminate firing on unarmed people. *People's Age* reported:

... the source of inspiration to these young Ratings were the people who rushed to their aid even in the thick of firing. The sea face around the Gateway of India was choked—full of all sorts of people—young and old, men, women and children, Hindus and Muslims, men from all parts of India. They came with their baskets and packets of fruits and other eatables, to shower on motor launches coming out from the ships. Indian military pickets would look on and not interfere. Ordinary folk were doing their best to get food packets to the Ratings inside.²²

Joshi inspired Subrata Banerjee, who was in the Indian

21 *Ibid.*

22 *People's Age*, report by Arun Bose, March 3, 1946.

armed forces, to write an authentic report on the RIN strike. He introduced Subrata to many of those who had participated in the strike and also to some of the leaders of the Mutiny. But that was not all. As Subrata himself recalls:

The Congress had by then joined the Interim Government at the Centre. The process of transfer of power had started. There was much talk of reconstitution of the Indian armed forces. Joshi asked to prepare a memorandum on this issue from the Communist point of view... Frequent discussions with Joshi were a great help. Very soon the country and the party were caught in the grip of many changes. Under such circumstances, the memorandum that I had prepared could serve no purpose.

That was P.C. Joshi with a depth of mind and breadth of vision.

As the party General Secretary, P.C. Joshi travelled throughout the country in third class with a place only to sit, since the three-tier system did not exist in those days. He continuously tried to be in touch with the people, wanted to understand the custom, mode of living, culture and art of all the segments of our Indian society including the tribals. His brilliant imagination made the party grow from its infancy into a disciplined all India mass party with a membership of over 80,000 in 1947. His travels were also part of his campaign to propagate his political ideas. He once said:

...one of the best ways to let people know about the policies of the party was to travel in the third class compartment and open the party paper. It was bound to excite curiosity and lead to innumerable questions. That would give the comrades a chance to first understand the opinions and questions of the people and then to clear the doubts and prejudices. Indian travellers were inquisitive and in any case discussion was a form of 'time pass' as the vendors



First Congress of CPI, Bombay, 1943



A Group Photograph of the Central Cultural Squad



At His Study Table



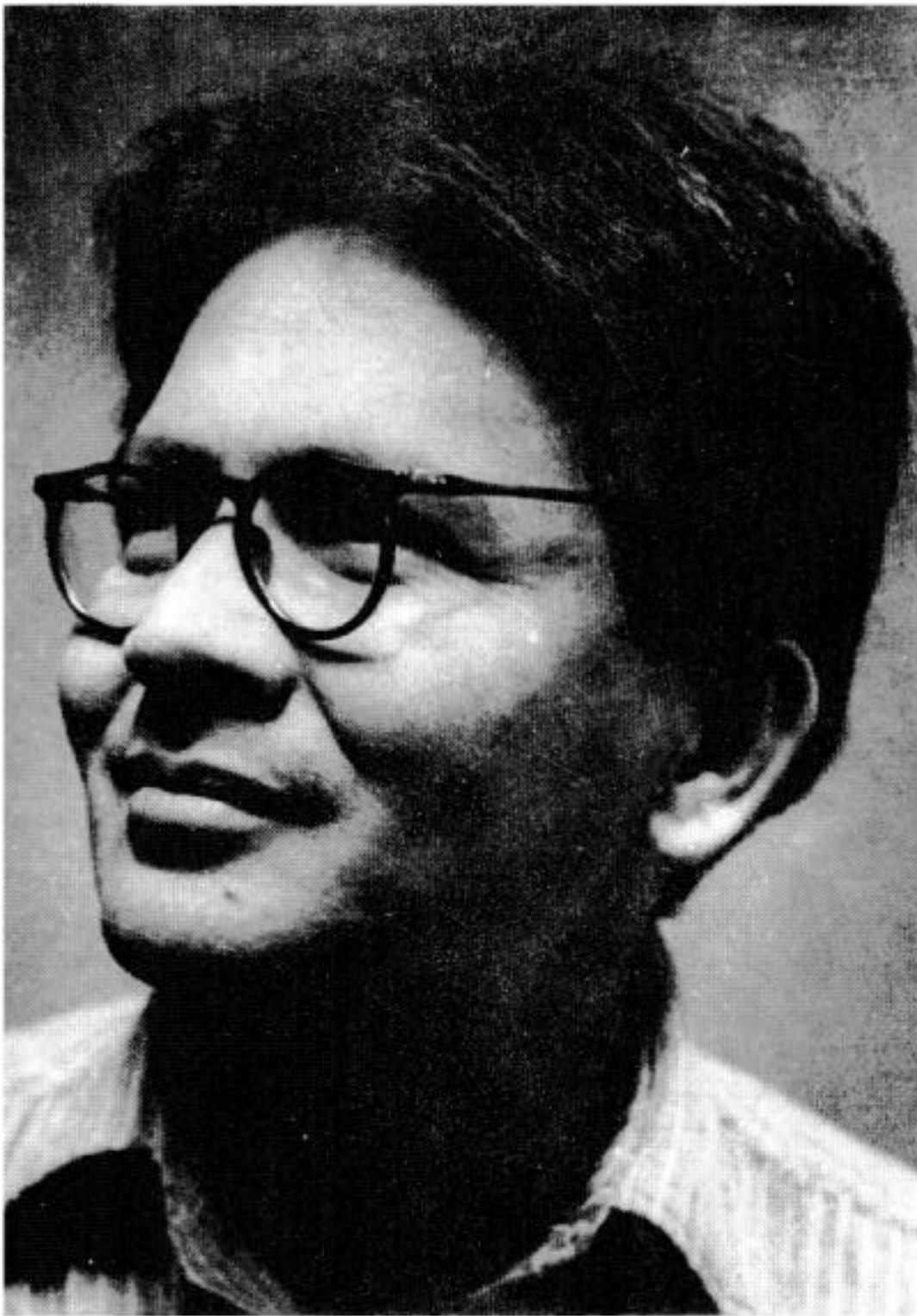
P. C. Joshi and Kalpana Joshi, 1943



Kalpana Dutt (Joshi)

of peanuts and *channa chur* would say to increase their sales!²³

During this period, Joshi emerged as the builder of the party and mass fronts. His tireless effort to create a new cultural ambience by bringing artists, intellectuals, writers, playwrights close to the people and the party has always been remembered by one and all. He was the messiah of the new cultural renaissance; but to underline this as his only contribution as a Communist leader is to actually demean him—for he was much more than that. He was indeed a visionary—the manner in which he took up the plight of the peasants after the Bengal Famine and geared the party towards building a militant kisan movement while at the same time helping the development of trade union struggles around the country was a testimony of his holistic comprehension of the importance of mass political actions for societal transformation. Simultaneously, he proved to be an excellent organiser as well as a remarkable communicator. He could reach the people through his lucid and cogent writings as an effective journalist as well as his personal equations. And above all, he built up the Communist Party of India from a scratch to a force with a membership of more than eighty thousand.



Famous Photograph of Joshi Taken by Sunil Janah

²³ Mohit Sen, *A Traveller and the Road: The Journey of An Indian Communist*, Rupa and Co., New Delhi, 2003, p. 120.

IV

JOSHI AND THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT

P.C. Joshi took charge of the Communist Party of India at a time when our national movement had been passing through a difficult phase. He could build the party from insignificant small Left local groups into a centralised all India political organisation. Under his stewardship, the CPI could acquire a national stature and he was soon recognised as a national leader. His unflinching patriotism blended with internationalism and his intense capacity to think and act made him a freedom fighter of a distinct category. No other Communist leader had such political perception and personal magnetic power. This enabled him to draw non-communists and even anti-communists close to him. The CPI shared the leadership with other Left elements like the Congress Socialist Party, Left Congressmen, local revolutionary groups. But the CPI played the decisive role and this was accepted and recognised by all. All this was undoubtedly Joshi's contribution.

P.C. Joshi's life and activities were replete with various problems related to international and national politics. The party leadership faced a serious challenge—there was, on the one hand, the struggle for liberation from British imperialism and, on the other hand, the defence of democracy and socialism from the onslaught of Fascism and

Nazism. Joshi considered Fascism as the worst form of imperialism. It was difficult for the CPI working from underground to take a clear political position on the issue of war.

The comrades detained in the Deoli Camp—Ranadive, Dange and Ajoy Ghosh—smuggled out a document characterising the War as a People's War and pleading for unqualified support to the War effort. Joshi's instant reaction was negative. He wrote much later about that document.

It did not go down my throat. I found no difference between the Deoli document and the Royist line.¹

Comrades in Deoli Camp prepared a document, scathingly attacking the national leadership of the Congress for continuing its anti-war attitude even after the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union. However, British Communist leaders asked P.C. Joshi and Dr Adhikari to tone down the Deoli Camp document so that it could harness the sentiment of the nation and of those who were outside the party periphery. The war had snapped the old contacts with the Communist Party of Great Britain and the party had to go underground. It was not easy to "swing over from the Imperialist to the People's War slogan with British imperialism sitting on our chest",² as confessed by Joshi. He continued in the same article:

Comrade Adhikari was more fanatically loyal to the international line than I was, and he was as indefatigable as he was humble. I respected him the most, after RPD. While in the leadership, after putting up my best fight, I always yielded to him trusting his judgment more than mine.³

1 P.C. Joshi, "Rajani Palme Dutt and Indian Communists", *op.cit.*

2 *Ibid.*

3 *Ibid.*

This document was published in November 1941, entitled "Forward to Freedom", in the name of Hansraj which was the underground name of P.C. Joshi. In its preface, it was written:

The fall of Singapore is as decisive a turning point as the fall of France..... The disastrous consequences of the fall of Singapore stare the entire anti-fascist front in the face, make the issue of colonial liberation and above all the Indian issue more urgent than ever before, make India the issue of the hour—which can be postponed no more except at the gravest peril of all freedom loving nations. The South Pacific is dominated by Japan, both on sea and air, the entire Indian Ocean stands open. The danger to India grows to the extent that the Japanese invasion looks inevitable and becomes only a question of time.⁴

Though this pamphlet of Joshi became a bible for the comrades within the party, the strategy of People's War as a war to fight Hitler's Fascism was misunderstood by the people in general. When the threat of Japanese aggression began to loom large over India, Joshi was asked to produce a new policy document for the new situation, replacing the old Deoli document. This was his chance to "improve the line and to make it more palatable" to national sentiment and this time Joshi advanced the new slogan "For National Defence, National Unity and National Government".⁵ Joshi then wrote a book, *The Indian Communist Party: Its Policy and Work in the War of Liberation*. It was published in September 1942 with an introduction by Harry Pollitt. In this Joshi wrote:

4 Hansraj, *Forward to Freedom (India in the War of Liberation)*, Anand Press, New Delhi, November 1941, p. 13.

5 P.C. Joshi, "Rajani Palme Dutt...", *op. cit.*, p. 13

6 P.C. Joshi, *The Indian Communist Party: Its Policy and Work in the War of Liberation*, CPGB Publication, London, September 1942, p. 3

The attack on the USSR transforms the character of the imperialist war into a people's war... The victory of the USSR becomes the guarantee of people's liberation all over the world.⁶

Referring to the perfidious Western role in nurturing Fascism, he explained:

The British and American imperialists were not blind to this danger, but they deliberately allowed these (Fascist) Powers to grow as a spearhead of counter-revolution in Europe and in the East and against the Soviet Union. As the bosses of the world, they were playing 'big and dangerous' game of nourishing reaction and hurling it against the rising peoples' movements throughout the world. This is how they sought to solve their own conflicts at the expense of the peoples and the Soviet Union.⁷

This policy meant the strengthening of Fascism, the spread of the Second World War upon the Soviet Union. To defeat this monstrous policy of the Fascists and the pro-Fascist reactionaries, the advanced sections of the peoples' movement sought to create a world-wide Anti-Fascist Peace Front.⁸

On the party's role in the context of India in the new situation, he cogently explained:

... the peoples of India and of the colonies in the East, who have learned by their experience that freedom cannot come as a gift from imperialists, also know well that it can neither come to them on the point of the blood-stained swords of the Japanese Fascists.⁹

Elaborating further, he wrote:

We can no more fight for our freedom by opposing this war. We will be cutting our own throats by doing so. We

7 *Ibid.*, p. 4.

8 *Ibid.*

9 *Ibid.*, p. 6.

will not be hitting at British imperialism at all, but doing the job of the Japanese Fascists for them. We can neither stand outside this war because we are slaves of British imperialism. To take the attitude of neutrality to this war is to remain where we are—under British imperialism and helplessly waiting for a worse fate under Japanese Fascism. The policy of neutrality to this war leads not to India's freedom but to the kingdom of Japanese jackals.¹⁰

Joshi not only pointed to the danger of Japanese fascism looming large on the Eastern border, but evolved a national strategy to fight the twin enemies—imperialism and fascism. The ultimate goal was the freedom of India.

In the opinion of the Communist Party the people's way forward can be summed up in three slogans—Smash the stalemate, Assert national unity, Mobilise the masses.¹¹

Joshi continued in the same article:

The Communist Party works for the broadest possible mobilisation in a united front of the Congress, the Moslem League, the Trade Union Congress, the All India Kisan Sabha and the All India Students' Federation. The National Congress is the premier political organisation of our people, representing the greatest national unity of the Indian people achieved so far. The Moslem League is the political organisation of the second largest community in our country. The Trade Unions, Kisan Sabhas, Students' Federation were born as fighting organisations and have functioned all through as the fighting forces of the nation. The widest unity of these popular organisations within one Joint Front will be the widest mobilisation of India's unity.¹²

We appeal to all parties and all patriots who stand for

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 13.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 15.

¹² Ibid., p. 16.

the freedom of India:

Unite to take the People's War into the People's Hands.
Unite to fight for the National Government and
Democratic Liberties.

Unite to protect the People.

Unite to defend our beloved country.

Unite to win the People's War and India's Freedom.¹³

During the post-war period, the CPI was charged with acting as a traitor by both the Right and Left of the Congress leadership. The Right was headed by Sardar Patel, 'the traditional orthodox nationalist', as P.C. Joshi described him, the Left was led, besides the Forward Bloc, by the Congress Socialists like Jayaprakash Narayan. P.C. Joshi met Mahatma Gandhi a few times on behalf of the Communist Party and tried to shake him up, and convince him of the correctness of the party's political line. But there was no basic change in Gandhiji's attitude. The result was the publication of the *Gandhi-Joshi Correspondence* which sold like hot cake all over the country; and it was translated in all the main Indian languages. In fact, Joshi's long correspondence with Gandhiji explained what Joshi had meant by People's War. He wrote: "People in people's war mean all people the world over without exception." He divided the world into two camps—one of freedom and democracy and the other of fascist and imperialist slavery. He argued in the following way:

Every people has to choose for itself which camp they would line up with, whose victory they desire. The fate of the peoples of each country and of the whole world depends upon which side wins.

If the Fascist side wins, it is a Fascist-imperialist slavery of every country of the world and the end of freedom of all.

¹³ Ibid., p. 32.

If the Allied side wins, it means the cause of freedom itself (has been) saved. Every nation fights for its own and world liberation by fighting in this camp. The enslaved nations of the East are, of course, in a very difficult situation. How can they fight with the fire of patriotism burning in their bosoms when they are themselves in chains? The simple issue is that they have to fight the battle of their own national liberation in a new context, with a new strategy.

Let us rule out the alternatives first.

If the patriotic leaders of the colonial people oppose this war, they directly aid the Fascist enslavement of their own country and help the Fascist imperialists to conquer the rest of the world with the added strength of their resources and sign the death warrant of their own nation...

The more clearly we distinguish between the two camps which are at war, the more correctly we will be able to shape our national policy in the special conditions of today. National resistance to the fascist aggressor, together with the rest of the progressive forces which are fighting fascism, is the only path of national liberation from imperialist domination for us today....¹⁴

This was the gist of the argument presented by Joshi on behalf of the CPI.

Joshi had great admiration for Gandhiji but he was terribly upset about the false information given to Gandhiji about the Communists by other parties or Gandhiji's fellow travellers. Joshi through regular correspondence replied point by point to and refuted all the accusations Gandhiji had hurled upon the Communists on their political strategy and day-to-day lifestyle. It was Joshi who continued to argue with him and yet the tone of the letter was firm but

respectful: "I am writing to you because you are the nation's Father. It will be unpatriotic on my part to get angry with you even when you insult and humiliate us."¹⁵ It was Joshi who called Gandhi the nation's Father for the first time.

Gandhi also reciprocated the same love and affection when he wrote back to Joshi:

I know your worth. You have very able young men and women as selfless, as I would claim to be. You are all hard-working and possess great energy and you impose strict discipline on your workers. All this I prize and admire. I would not easily lose such a force because of any preconceived notions of mine.¹⁶

Gandhi's letter concludes as follows:

Lastly, I ask you to believe me that I want to impress the services of everyone of you for the cause of independence to be fought along the lines that I have chalked out for myself and the whole country. And if I am convinced that I am going astray and that yours is the correct method, I would like to be won over by you to your side and I will sincerely and gladly serve as an apprentice wanting to be enlisted as a unit in your ranks.¹⁷

Many of this generation may not know that Gandhi himself took R. D. Bharadwaj, a Communist leader who was underground, in his car to the AICC rostrum at the Ramgarh session of the Congress to avoid his arrest by the British police. This was an expression of the tolerance and mutual respect the nationalist and Communist leaderships had for each other in spite of their political and ideological differences. However, a lot of ill-feeling and tension grew at the lower levels because of the CPI's adoption of the strategy of people's war. Incidentally, it needs to be

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 19

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21— Letter from Sevagram, CP, July 30, 1944

¹⁴ *Correspondence between Mahatma Gandhi and P.C. Joshi*, Bombay, PPH, 1945. pp. 5-6)

mentioned here that the CPI, which was just then legalised, with its 13 AICC members led by Dr K.M. Ashraf, did not oppose the main 'Quit India' resolution at the Bombay AICC session on August 8, 1942, but moved an amendment to the operative part which was defeated.¹⁸ However, Joshi did not consider the party's political position as wrong. He felt the CPI's political reputation as an independent party was established for the first time. Its practical results were enormous.¹⁹

In fact, the transformation of the character of the war from imperialist war to people's war with the attack of Nazi Germany on the Soviet Union and the subsequent distancing of the Indian Communists from the Indian National Movement during the 'Quit India' struggle turned the Communists into "traitors" and "agents of the British" in the eyes of the people. It was difficult to explain to the people the complexities of the world situation which forced the Communists to revalue the war and formulate an independent strategy. CPI headquarters in Bombay had been attacked by a mob; many comrades were injured in a pitched battle. Joshi's meetings at Patna, Munger, Lakhisarai, Begusarai were not that successful; in many places, meetings were attacked, pelting of stones was a common feature. Joshi's life was in danger.

Although the Communists were treated as agents of the British for not joining the 'Quit India Movement' by the Congress, Congress Socialist Party and Forward Bloc, the ground reality was different. The irony was that the Communists were also severely persecuted by the British Government in this period. P.C. Joshi wrote in *People's War* on March 7, 1943:

18 Dilip Bose, "P.C. Joshi: Moulder of a Generation", *Mainstream*, November 22, 1980.

19 Joshi in an interview on 6 April, 1951 in party headquarters, File no. CPI 1951/47, *Archives of Contemporary Indian History*, JNU.

The Government attacked us as the Fifth Column of the Congress, arrested our agitators, detained our organisers without trial, raided our offices and denied us permission to hold meetings. We suffered the lack of civil liberties with the rest of the national movement except that our Party was formally legal.

P.C. Joshi differed from Gandhi's strategy of 'Do or Die', but he did launch a campaign for the release of the Congress leaders and he was very serious about it. A resolution was passed at the Central Committee meeting on September 20, 1942. "It condemns imperialist repression against the Congress and the people. It points out that at a time when the imperialist bureaucracy is riding rough-shod over the people, it is really isolated from all sections of the people and it is tottering." It was resolved to carry on a countrywide campaign for National Unity, for the release of national leaders, for forcing the hands of the bureaucracy for a National Government. The resolution further stated:

The Communist Party warns the British Government that if it persists in this policy, if it persists in its attempt to crush the Congress, it will only succeed in creating a common disaster for the British and the Indian peoples. The only way out of this perilous situation which grows more critical every day, is to stop this offensive of repression against the people and the Congress, to release Mahatma Gandhi and the Congress leaders, to lift the ban on the Congress and to open negotiations with the Congress and the other political parties, specially the Muslim League, for the establishment of a Provisional National Government, fully empowered and determined to unite and mobilise the people for the defence and freedom of the country The Communist Party of India, which is pledged to forge national unity to solve this national crisis, appeals to the workers and the progressive peoples of Britain and America to bring pressure upon

the British Government to concede these just national demands of the Indian people and thus clear the path of our common victory in this war of liberation."²⁰

Similarly, on February 15, 1943, another resolution was passed by the Party for the release of Gandhiji to end the national crisis.

No longer could the nation's leaders behind prison bars continue to be helpless witnesses to this disaster. Gandhiji's fast is a desperate call to the entire nation to wake up before it is too late and unite to save itself from utter extinction.

The same hands that locked the jail gates on the nation's leaders on August 9, refuse to unlock them now. The life of the nation's foremost leader is in peril. His call for settlement, the only way out, is spurned.

It is "Now or Never" for our entire nation. We either get Gandhiji out and solve the crisis; or we sink in it deeper still irrevocably, and helplessly get carried on by it from the arms of one enslaver into those of another.

At the time of Gandhiji's fast, Joshi as the General Secretary of the CPI specially appealed to the working class, kisan, and student organisations to rally behind the campaign for Gandhiji's release. The manifesto issued by the party on the occasion of May Day solidarity said:

Nothing but our failure to unite the major organisations has kept power and National Government from us. Today this failure keeps the national leaders in jail and enforces starvation on our millions—Hindus and Muslims alike. It nearly cost us Gandhiji's life when he was on fast.²¹

Joshi had the rare political acumen to understand the ground reality. He knew it was not possible for the Communist Party to move in isolation. That's why he

²⁰ *People's War*, September 20, 1942.

²¹ *People's War*, April 25, 1943.

repeatedly popularised the demand of National Government for National Defence. After the famine of 1943 and the ensuing food crisis, he projected the demand for a National Government for National Defence and People's Food.

In fact, with the same zeal, Joshi geared the party network to work for Gandhiji's release and also of the leaders of the Congress. He wrote to Gandhiji:

We expected you to take the lead towards Congress-League unity to embody the unity of our major patriotic organisations and ensure transfer of power into popular hands. In fact, our most insistent slogan in your absence was only your release, and the establishment of National Government would guarantee the country's defence and the People's food.²²

The Congress Working Committee had served the Communist members of the AICC a formal chargesheet. Joshi wrote the answer—*Communist Reply to the Working Committee*—which was longish and published in two volumes. This reply politically helped the Communists to stand up to the Congress onslaught and charges all over the country during the 1946 election campaign for the Provincial Assemblies which in return had to elect the Constituent Assembly. Joshi believed that this reply strengthened the party at that critical time. He wrote much later: "Even the Congressmen who disagreed with us began to admit our bonafides and that we had a principled line and a worthwhile case to argue."²³ Mohit Sen aptly said that "P.C. Joshi had the knack of expressing in a national idiom even what was a nationally

²² P.C. Joshi, *Communist Reply to Congress Working Committee's Charges*, Part 1, Bombay, PPH, December 1945, p. 210.

²³ P.C. Joshi, "Sushobhan Sarakar, A Dedicated Teacher: Some Memories", *New Thinking Communist*, July 15, 2001

unacceptable political line".²⁴ That helped the Communists draw closer even to those who totally disagreed with them. The opponents could not question Joshi's integrity and intellectual strength.

Joshi's response to national and international events was spontaneous, farsighted and forthright. The Second World War came to an end on May 9, 1945 with the fall of Berlin. Joshi criticised those who considered the victory over Fascism as not a victory for India. He wrote after the end of the War a moving article entitled "Victory in Europe, its meaning for India". Joshi argued:

The Red Army not only fought more Germans than any other allied army, but fought the most decisive battles. When Hitler attacked the USSR, the whole of Europe lay prostrate at his feet. His plan was to burst through Soviet land and wage the battle for Asia in alliance with the Japanese, and having made himself master of two continents, bring the Americas down. Red Army resistance foiled his global plans and saved the world.....British reaction will face its own people at the General Elections. A return to pre-war Britain is not at all inevitable....

Thus if the British people fight for their bread, they will have to agree to our freedom too !

It is not enough to say we too stand for freedom; we have to march together with the freedom-loving humanity.

It is not enough to say we too want freedom, we have to unite with our brother patriots in our own country.....

A united national movement under its own Provisional National Government will stop the rot within our own country. The era of helplessness and frustration will end and the era of constructive efforts begin. The days of the hoarders, profiteers and corrupt officials will end, and while meeting the immediate needs of the people right

now, we will begin planning for a post-war future of plenty.²⁵

Thus Joshi refuted the popular dominant national understanding that the imperialists have become stronger by winning this War.

After the War, expectations for a transfer of power soared. But the Attlee-Wavell announcement came as a rude shock and Joshi on September 20, 1945 issued the following statement:

This declaration which is an insult to the Indian people and a blow to both the Congress and the League is the bitter fruit of our own disunity. This is a common challenge to both the Congress and the League and to their respective goals... The Congress and the League can meet the challenge and avert the common disaster by confronting the British Government with a joint plan of holding Constituent Assemblies, elected on the basis of Adult Suffrage in agreed demarcated zones in present British India, as well as in the present Indian states, so that Independent and democratic India can emerge as a Union or an alliance of sovereign states.²⁶

But before this statement, Joshi repeatedly appealed to the national leaders of both the Congress and Muslim League to bridge their differences so as to ensure the realisation of a national government. Joshi wrote:

The Gandhi-Jinnah meeting is a great event in the national history of India. Ever since the outbreak of the war, the Congress and the League have been addressing their demands to the British Government which has been showing them the door. The great leaders of these two organisations are meeting to see if they can come together,

²⁴ Mohit Sen, *op. cit.*, p. 26

²⁵ *People's War*, May 20, 1945.

²⁶ *People's War*, September 23, 1945)

if a United Front can be established to put an end to British insolence. They are turning their back towards the imperialist rulers. They are stretching their hands to each other as own brothers. It is a turn of historic significance.

During the last two years, when the Leaguers thought that the Congress did not want to understand their position, when the Congressmen thought that the Leaguers did not want unity, we alone proclaimed that there was no way out for the country, except through Congress-League agreement. We tirelessly campaigned for Congress-League unity and did our bit towards moulding patriotic opinion.²⁷

Joshi was extremely disappointed at the failure of the Gandhi-Jinnah meet, and he called upon them to meet again. P.C. Joshi's pamphlet *They Must Meet* and after the failure of the talks another one *They Must Meet Again* were sold on the streets by the comrades. This was the period when innumerable articles came out from Joshi's pen. On October 7, 1945 a call was given for Congress-League-Communist National United Front. On October 27, 1946 in *People's Age* Joshi talked about the failure of the Nehru-Jinnah talks, pointing out how British imperialists outmanoeuvred the Congress-League leaderships; it was the inevitable outcome of compromising policies.

The question of nationalities and the demand of national self-determination including the right to secede based on the Soviet experience tarnished the image of the Communist Party. This was an indirect approval of the demands for Pakistan and Sikh homeland. It was a great blunder for the party to push forward the demand of national self-determination. This again isolated the Communists from the national mainstream and they had to pay for it in the forthcoming elections of 1946. All the

²⁷ *People's War*, August 20, 1944.

Communists were asked to resign from Congress membership. Joshi gave a call for Congress-League-Communist National United Front for common freedom and self-determination. Joshi wrote in *People's Age*, 'Reject the British plan—Communist Appeal to the AICC':

If the Congress can combine acceptance of self-determination together with prompt measures by the Congress Ministries for the abolition of landlordism, ending profiteering, it will not only rouse the common Musalman, allay their suspicions about Hindu capitalism within the Congress, but make it difficult for the Muslim feudal landlord leadership within the League itself to escape unity.²⁸

Joshi felt that the Congress leadership was getting into an imperialist trap. He further said:

The most important issue facing our freedom movement and which the British are able to exploit to stay longer in our land is the controversy over "Union" and "Partition". Either the Congress solves the problem in a democratic manner or the British exploit it for disruptive purposes.

He continued in the same article about the role of the Left in the given situation where he observed:

The chief responsibility of fighting against the British plan inside the Congress and for a policy of encouraging mass struggles lies on the Left elements. The Left elements stand for no compromise. They see through the diabolical British plan. They see how the temper of our people is rising. Will they muster sufficient clarity and courage to speak and fight for a policy which alone saves national honour, is based on just, democratic principles and becomes the practical platform for the next phase of our freedom movement?

By boldly advocating rejection of the plan, taking

²⁸ *People's Age*, July 7, 1946.

leadership of the growing struggles, and unequivocal acceptance of self-determination, the Left elements can fight political compromise and disruption and rescue the country's honour.²⁹

When Joshi found that that AICC had accepted the British plan, he was disappointed and considered that as a triumph of the compromisers. He gave a call for a countrywide campaign against the British plan and for an Indian plan instead in the Constitution-making body and a continuation of popular struggles.³⁰

The Muslim League in its Council meeting put forward an argument which revealed its separatist attitude. It argued that if the Congress had accepted Pakistan, the Muslim League would have formed a United Front with it against the British, but instead of that the Congress wanted the League to be bypassed and come to terms with the British. Therefore, the League had to proceed on an unilateral basis.

This attitude of the League was criticised in the Communist Party's journal as being undemocratic.

Does the League leadership think that they are creating a good atmosphere for settlement with the Congress when they let loose a most violent anti-Congress and anti-Hindu campaign, treating the major political organisation in the country, not as a potential ally, but openly declaring it to be an enemy, insulting its President-elect day in and day out; abusing respected non-League Muslim patriots in the most offensive language.³¹

The report continued with its harsh criticism:

No democrat could accept the Pakistan demand as it was put forward by the League leadership.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *People's Age*, July 14, 1946.

³¹ Report by Sajjad Zaheer on Muslim League Council meeting held on June 5-6, 1946, New Delhi, *People's Age*, July 7, 1946.

P.C. Joshi issued a statement on July 30, 1946 on the Muslim League's rejection of British proposals: "The League resolution must be an eye-opener to the Congress leadership." He asked the Congress leadership to reject the plan and raise the slogan of a Constituent Assembly, based on adult franchise and self-determination, and asked the leadership to build a joint struggle with the League against the British refusal to quit India.³²

The Communists were sharply criticised for their proposal of self-determination which was formulated by Dr G. Adhikari. Joshi was reportedly not fully convinced of the thesis and expressed his opinion to Adhikari. But once the party leadership decided on it, the party journal regularly published articles on the key significance of self-determination. It was written:

Self-determination of nationalities is not just a question of whether a national unit separates or not. On the other hand, it is a great revolutionary unifying principle which guarantees real freedom and democracy to the people of each nationality in independent India.

Self-determination of nationalities means the bringing together of the common people of the same nationality, Hindus and Muslims to fight against imperialist-feudal regime against princely autocracy and landlordism.³³

In 1946-47, RPD punctured the CPI's Pakistan—Self-Determination of Nationalities theory. Much later in 1951, Joshi in an interview disclosed this information and added that the main architect of this theory Dr Adhikari took six months to understand RPD's contention. According to Joshi, a national government based on Congress-League unity was sound till the end of the War days. But Congress-League unity as the basis of Pakistan was wrong. He said:

³² *People's Age*, August 4, 1946.

³³ *People's Age*, August 18, 1946.

We were right in being critical and accusing the Congress of a sectarian outlook on Pakistan. But we were not having a critical outlook on Jinnah. Secondly, we equated Pakistan with national self-determination. The tactical policy would be the further working out of this.³⁴

The Communist Party felt that the Muslim League while arousing the anti-imperialist upsurge among the Muslim masses misdirected them in a separatist consolidation. The Muslim League's demand of a separate Muslim state in the North-West and North-East areas containing some 40 per cent non-Muslims, without the democratic vote of the people of those areas and denying self-determination to the nationalities contained therein, was undemocratic.³⁵

The appeal of the Communist Party to both the Congress and the League proved to be futile. The All India Muslim League in its Council meeting in Bombay on July 29, 1946 resolved to carry out a programme of Direct Action to achieve what it wanted, that is, a separate state called Pakistan. It designated August 16, 1946 as the Direct Action Day to pressurise the government but what followed were the most horrific riots that engulfed the nation. Calcutta was the worst affected and the Great Calcutta Killings are recorded in history. The riots spread to Bombay, Punjab, UP. There were reports of horrible and savage butcheries of Hindus and Muslims. The Communists plunged in relief and rescue work.

Joshi instructed all the members to start relief committees, to work for the redress of the sufferings of the refugees and to see how further riots could be prevented. At the same time, he explained the necessity of Hindu-

³⁴ P.C. Joshi, Question-Answer session in party headquarters, April 6, 1951, File No. CPI 1951/47, *Archives of Contemporary India*, JNU.

³⁵ *People's Age*, August 18, 1946.

Muslim unity in order to win independence from British rule. Joshi considered at that juncture that to work among the people, help them and unite them as the most important task. He himself was rushing like mad all over the country during that riot wave. Joshi felt that the League's struggle has led to a civil war, not an anti-imperialist fight. Joshi wrote: "They were not communal riots of the old type. They are political riots—the direct result of Congress-League conflict. They have gone so far that everything is at stake—common life, common struggle and common freedom. Only the British Raj is safe."³⁷

In the midst of traumatic communal holocaust, it was Joshi who had the national stature to appeal to the Hindu, Muslim and Sikh masses with equal authority that Gandhi and Nehru had. His appeals were carried to the grass-roots by his comrades, and touched the hearts of sensible Indians of all opinions. When Nehru found that Govind Ballabh Pant was going soft on the RSS, he asked Joshi to go to Pant, who was a close relation of Joshi from his mother's side. Joshi at that juncture could convince him with his cogent arguments based on facts and figures. It had an impact on Pant, who henceforth campaigned against the RSS. This incident and the preceding Gandhi-Joshi correspondence revealed that Joshi could acquire a national stature within a few years of his being the General Secretary of the CPI. What was so special about him? If one analyses Joshi, one finds that he never ignored the criticism of the CPI by the Congress and invariably replied to the Congress leaders including Gandhiji. He never compromised the party's political position and was often sharp in what he wrote or spoke. However, he used the language that would not give the impression that he was speaking to an

³⁶ *People's Age*, August 25, 1946

³⁷ *People's Age*, October 27, 1946.

opponent. His usage of words helped the Congressmen appreciate and understand the positions of the Communists, even if they did not agree with him. That was why P.C. Joshi was acceptable and admired by a wide spectrum of people at large.

Independence was approaching. Violence in the form of riots and rape and abduction of women engulfed areas like Noakhali and Tippera in October 1946 following the Great Calcutta Killings of August 16-19, 1946. Gandhiji rushed to Noakhali and tried to unite Hindus and Muslims so that the country would not be divided. Joshi knew that feelings of revenge could not be eliminated with counter-revenge. Sympathising with the affected people in Noakhali, P.C. Joshi issued a statement on October 20, 1946:

I earnestly appeal to the justifiably shocked Hindu brothers not to get provoked. The spirit of revenge can only intensify mutual killing to the greater delight of the British imperialists alone. The best way to help the Hindus in East Bengal is not to stab but guarantee absolute safety to Muslims where they are a minority.³⁸

Throughout this critical period, his fight was focussed on restoring communal peace. He asked the party comrades and sympathisers to work in one's locality in the riot situation and start the most broadbased united peace campaign; in all dangerous areas even to risk death in order to bring peace. He gave example of the martyrdom of Comrade Lalmohan Sen who gave his life to save the minority community. He called upon the mass leaders, workers and peasant comrades to stand on guard till the end of the riot.³⁹

³⁸ *People's Age*, October 27, 1946.

³⁹ P.C. Joshi, "To All Party Members, Sympathisers", *People's Age*, September 14, 1947.

Joshi condemned the League's hate campaign and also gave a call for a united struggle of the common people as the only way to go forward.⁴⁰ He repeatedly appealed to the Congress leadership to reject the British plan. While articulating his plea before the AICC's Meerut session (1946), he penned down his arguments with strong conviction.

Only our Party raised the warning voice that there is no transfer of power in the British Plan, but only exploitation of Indian differences, disruption of the Indian Revolution, creation of an India divided between warring Hindu and Muslim zones and controlled by the British through their Fifth Column, the Indian Princes.

The Congress leadership thought otherwise. It saw the British Plan 'a stepping stone to Indian freedom'. It silenced all criticism with the arguments that the people were up on their legs which was true, that the Congress strong, which was also true and that therefore the British were prepared to quit, which was just NOT true.

The Meerut Congress must call for a total rejection of the British Plan and a full throated declaration that the Congress will draft a Constitution only on the basis of Indian Independence, national self-determination and real democracy.⁴¹

Mountbatten came up with his plan in March 1947 and there was a round of conferences on the transfer of power with the leaders. But Gandhiji stayed away from this discussion because he never wanted partition.

In 1946, RPD visited India as the representative of the *Daily Worker* to cover the activities of the Cabinet Mission. It was a very significant event for Joshi. RPD met the Congress leaders and Nehru more than once. Joshi

⁴⁰ *People's Age*, November 3, 1946.

⁴¹ *People's Age*, November 17, 1946.

remembered the meetings of the party's leadership with RPD that he recalled much later:

He (RPD) stressed the need for greater vigilance and sustained new thinking all along the line. A new historic phase was opening. Indian independence was on the agenda. British imperialism in its desperation would try out its most destructive cunning. The Indian party should be ready for quick turns and twists in the situation.

Nehru remained good but was weak, RPD said. There was real danger of his being swamped by the Right in his own party.

RPD's advice was:

Build up the broken bridges with the Congress. The differences between the CPI and the Congress over the character of the war would become a thing of the past but support to the Muslim League's demand for Pakistan was the real hindrance. RPD had never agreed with our support to Pakistan as our concrete application of the Leninist teaching on the nationalities problem.⁴²

This rethinking had already started within the party which gave second thoughts on the whole question of self-determination. Misusing Lenin in support of Pakistan was given up. The Communist leadership stressed the dire need for Hindu-Muslim unity with the Congress and the Muslim League coming to a mutually satisfactory agreement on the basis of Indian independence.

Independence of India in 1947 was a turning point for the Communist movement. Joshi welcomed the independence and considered it as the first positive step on the part of the struggle for national regeneration. For him, it was a new era for a movement of all the progressive Indian masses against a handful of reactionaries. For him,

⁴² P.C. Joshi: "Rajani Palme Dutt, An Indian Communist", *op. cit.*

it was the building of a new nation against the feudal, Right wing impediments within the country, and against the neo-colonialist danger these elements represented.

However, Joshi was soon cornered within the party. The majority in the Communist leadership characterised the Indian independence as fake. How could a national bourgeois leadership usher in an independent regime? Joshi was soon removed from General Secretaryship. How could such a drastic change in political understanding happen about which Joshi as the General Secretary remained unaware? There are no short-cut answers for these questions. It was the end of an era.

Joshi's period (1936-48) has been the most brilliant chapter of the Indian Communist movement. This was the time when under his leadership the Communists made a sharp turn towards the path of national political action. He raised the party to a national stature. He himself came in touch with national leaders of all shades—Mahatma Gandhi, Nehru, Sardar Patel, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Rafi Ahmad Kidwai. He had intimate political relations with the Congress Socialist leaders—Jayaprakash Narayan, Acharya Narendra Dev, M.R. Masani, Ashok Mehta and others. Joshi was not only a CPI leader, but a national figure. Amongst the intellectuals and politically class conscious activists, he was considered a leader next only to Jawaharlal Nehru. It was during his period that not only did the CPI become a national party, but it also played a part in the mainstream national movement with a large number of self-sacrificing cadres who turned out to be the finest Communist patriots.

P.C. Joshi wanted his comrades to be the best freedom fighters, not to have a narrow outlook, to reach out to everyone, even those who were opposed to them.

V

POST-INDEPENDENCE

The Struggle Within

Independence came to a fractured nation. The country was engulfed in fratricidal communal riots that preceded and followed partition with streams of refugees crossing the border from both sides, east and west. Like Mahatma Gandhi, P.C. Joshi was also opposed to the Mountbatten Plan of dividing India as accepted by both the Congress and Muslim League. He was well aware that it would not solve the Hindu-Muslim problem but actually intensify all conflicts. A few weeks before the final transfer of power, he wrote in *People's Age*:

It is becoming commonly realised that partition will weaken the two parts both economically and militarily. But it is not yet realised how it is the very essence of the British plan, first to weaken us through partition and then use the very fact of our weakness to get economic and military control over the two states under the cover of offering 'economic aid' and helping in 'common Defence' through continued membership of the British Empire.¹

When finally India won freedom from British rule, P.C. Joshi

welcomed the independence and considered it as the first milestone in India's journey towards national regeneration. For him, the task was one of nation-building in the midst of the unimaginable problems before the country as well as meeting the challenges of rehabilitating the refugees, dousing the flames of communal holocaust, foiling the game-plan of the RSS and those helping it within the government to destabilise free India in its infancy. On October 8, 1947 he addressed a 25,000-strong rally in Calcutta organised by the Bengal Committee of the party where he said: "It is not Pandit Nehru who should resign, but those who are opposing him inside the government." He felt the urgent necessity of rallying behind the government to overcome the crises the nation was facing. Thereafter he spelt out the duty of the party in the prevailing conditions:

The Communist Party appeals and will continue to appeal to the Left parties that it is our special responsibility to save the country by coming together without delay. The time for discussion is over. The people are demanding marching orders and impatiently ask what they have to do.... The time for action has come. I shall have no hesitation to see anybody and I am ready to meet the leaders of the Forward Bloc, the Socialist Party, the Revolutionary Socialist Party and others. We have got to close up our ranks in the face of the common danger that threatens our freedom today... We have first of all to realise the gravity of the crisis.²

P.C. Joshi analysed the nature of the communal riots which, in his opinion, were not just an outbreak of communal passion. He called for a new united front extending from Gandhiji and Nehru on the one hand to the Socialist, Communist and other Left groups on the other.

¹ *People's Age*, July 20, 1947.

² *People's Age*, October 19, 1947.

He exposed the long-term political agenda of the communal forces—a planned offensive against the administration.

In fact, the Congress and Communists as well as the other Left parties in Delhi came close to each other in this hour of crisis. Representatives of the Students' Congress and Students' Federation walked through the streets in a peace march. Joshi emphatically said that the main problem of the day was protection of minorities and not transfer of population. At this particular time, it was Gandhiji of all the Congress leaders who impressed him the most. Gandhiji spoke the right words in the right spirit. In his prayer meeting on September 15, 1947, Gandhiji said: "Let the Hindus and Sikhs take the right step and invite the Muslims who have been driven out of their homes to return. If they can take this courageous step worthy from every point of view, they immediately reduce the refugee problem to its simplest terms..." Joshi fully agreed with him when Gandhiji said: "The transfer of millions of Hindus and Sikhs and Muslims is unthinkable. It is wrong. The wrong of Pakistan will be undone by the right of resolute non-transference of population. I hope I shall have the courage to stand by it, even though mine may be the solitary voice in its favour." Joshi was deeply moved by this speech at the prayer meeting and he quoted this in his article in *People's Age* published on September 21, 1947.

The dawn of independence unfolded an altogether new chapter for the Communist Party. A section within the party leadership considered the independence a fake one; it was an unreal freedom. For them the main enemy was the Congress which was a tool of British imperialism. Nehru was equated with Chiang-Kai-Shek, Telengana was compared to Yenan. It appeared that Soviet leader Zhdanov's call to the Communist Parties in capitalist nations to organise militant movements under the leadership of the working class boosted the morale of this section. The most

prominent of this section were B.T. Ranadive and the person whom Joshi admired the most, Dr G. Adhikari.

Just after independence around the end of 1947, S.A. Dange went to Belgrade and met Edward Kardelj, an important spokesperson of the Cominform (the new name of Comintern). Kardelj told Dange that Indian Communists needed to take an offensive line against the Congress which was a satellite of imperialism. He cautioned Dange against Joshi and questioned his reliability because of Joshi's affinity to Gandhi, Nehru and the Congress. On his return Dange reported this to the party Politbureau (PB) which comprised P.C. Joshi, G. Adhikari, B.T. Ranadive, Ajoy Ghosh and R.D. Bharadwaj. The last two were ill and not present at the PB meeting. The international warning about Joshi strengthened the already growing scepticism within the party leadership in regard to Joshi's political line of united front. By then a whispering factional campaign had begun that Joshi's reformist leadership was an obstacle to the imminent Indian revolution. Joshi was accused of not giving attention to build a militant revolutionary organisation. He was charged with nurturing an Indian joint family with himself as the patriarch. RPD could sense the creeping anti-Joshi feeling within the party leadership and had warned Joshi about the impending danger when he came to India accompanying the Cabinet Mission in 1946. His warnings proved prophetic.

Joshi found that the majority of the Central Committee members differed with his assessment of the national situation. He resigned from the post of party General Secretary but his resignation was kept a secret from the party rank-and-file and the general public. In December 1947, B.T. Ranadive was made the de facto General Secretary against the party's constitutional norms.

Joshi was not only politically isolated but had to face terrible humiliation. He was pressurised to make self-

criticism for holding up the Indian revolution. Much later he wrote: "I voluntarily appeared in sack cloth and ashes as the main and real culprit. I was myself that stupid, when I should have known better."³

Slowly, almost the entire bulk of comrades, who at one time looked upon Joshi with awe, admiration and respect, deserted him as the leadership turned against him. All his intellectual, Cambridge-Oxford brand of bright comrades—like Mohan Kumaramangalam, Arun Bose, N.K. Krishnan—left Joshi one by one and became part of the new leadership with the firm conviction that a revolution was imminent. This could happen because Joshi had given too much importance to these intellectuals without any national or mass background and had brought them to the helm of the party. Joshi had to pay a heavy price for his reliance on such groups instead of real trade union and peasant leaders. Incidentally, it was the prominent leader of the Andhra peasantry, P. Sundarayya, who stood by Joshi initially when his isolation in the party had started. As for the new political line, there were a few who might have questioned it but the majority of the party comrades felt convinced that the independence which had come to India was a sham.

The Second Congress of the Communist Party was held in February 1948 in Mohammad Ali Park in Calcutta. The new leadership gave a call for armed struggle; the slogans were: "Telengana's path is our path" and "Yeh azadi jhooti hai". Ranadive felt that the line of National Front, adopted at the Seventh Congress of the Comintern, was redundant now with the end of the War and defeat of Fascism. However, the struggle for national independence continued as the national bourgeois leadership of the Congress had betrayed the people and compromised with British imperialism. Therefore, he argued, the party should go back

to the line of revolutionary struggle taken at the Comintern's Sixth Congress—that is, to fight and not unite with the national bourgeoisie.

However, what pained Joshi most was the conspiratorial and factional methods used to win support for the above line. Many of his associates also felt the same way and have written accordingly in their reminiscences.

P.C. Joshi could not agree with the assessment of the new leadership on the role of the national bourgeoisie. He did not agree that the bourgeoisie as a whole had gone over to imperialism. He said:

This mistaken notion was also the evidence of our theoretical backwardness and subjectivism. It is obligatory for a Communist not to have any illusion about any progressive revolutionary role of the bourgeoisie as a class in the epoch of general crisis of capitalism... In the colonial countries, above all, it is impermissible for any Communist, however ignorant, to treat the bourgeoisie as one block specially at the moment its leading section goes in for compromise and the proletariat is yet too weak to prevent a compromise.⁴

Joshi was suspended on January 27, 1949. He was considered a danger to the safety of the party. He was found 'guilty of persisting in his political reformism and persisting in the same treacherous line which betrays the working class into the hands of the bourgeoisie; since the Party Congress (1948) he has done nothing to prove that he is making earnest endeavour to get rid of it nor has he shown the humility to learn from others...'. In its resolution, the Party PB called upon the party members all over India 'to study the lessons arising from Joshi's deterioration, and to rally around the banner of the Party which is determined to

3 P.C. Joshi, *Rajani Palme Dutt and Indian Communists*, op. cit.

4 Views No. 1: *To Comrades Abroad and B.T. Ranadive—Under the Red Banner* by P.C. Joshi, Shibpur, Howrah, May 1950, pp. 39-40.

uphold the principles of Marxism-Leninism on every front, which refuses to appease capitulators, vacillators or slanderers and which is determined to sweep aside every obstacle that it faces in its onward march to revolution'.⁵

Though he was charged with such accusations, in this entire period Joshi never tried to form a faction of his own or a rival party. He wrote to the West Bengal Party Secretariat on August 4, 1949 refuting the charge of starting a rival party:

The petty slanderers themselves know that every honest Communist holds loyalty to the party dearer than life itself. The enemies of our party have yet to learn that nothing that they can do will ever damage the unity of our party which will ultimately triumph scattering to the winds all slanderers and oppressors through successful organisation of the struggle of our people for real independence and people's democracy which alone can be the abiding basis to build a clear, healthy, happy and prosperous national life.⁶

When Joshi was finally expelled from the Communist Party in December 1949, he was deeply hurt at his expulsion and that too his learning this from the press. In his press statement he said: "The more practical failures arising from the wrong policy, the more drastic and unprincipled become purges of loyal and sincere members of the Party and I only claim to be one of them." On February 18, 1950, he appealed to the Central Secretariat against his expulsion:

You ought to know as well as I do that I have yet the PARTY RIGHT guaranteed to me by the Party constitution itself of appealing to the Control Commission AGAINST

the decision of the CC (Central Committee) which you took one whole year to manoeuvre through and realise your heart's big but foul desire.

But try however much, you will not succeed in provoking me to repeat the crime of your own youth, that is, try to split the party and start a rival racket. I have learnt my P. lesson much better. My loyalty to the Party is greater, far greater than my holy Party anger against you and what you have done to the Party.

I have no doubt whatever that the day of reckoning will come when besides your other crimes, you will have to answer before the entire Party how and why you violated every principle of Party organisation and deprived me of my inherent Party rights by functioning as an unprincipled arch bureaucrat, misusing Party authority, ignoring the Party constitution, denying the inherent rights of an old Party member like me, worse than has ever been done in the entire life of our Party. This I say with a full sense of responsibility and after the coolest and longest thought I am capable of and with my hand on my heart.⁷

This letter is a testimony to Joshi's love for the party. The party was his life; he sincerely loved the party and wanted it to grow and create a space in national politics for the building of a new India. He used to tell young comrades even at the fag end of his life: "You cannot leave the party as one cannot leave one's mother even if she goes wrong." Though shattered by the expulsion, he remained loyal to the party and resisted forming a rival group or splitting the party. Throughout his life he was a loner, struggling within and arguing his line and strategy but never breaking away from the party which he himself had built up and nurtured so that it could blossom.

5 Summary of the Polit-Bureau Resolution on P.C. Joshi's Suspension, January 27, 1949, File No. CPI 1951/49, *Archives of Contemporary Indian History*, JNU.

6 *Views No. 1, op. cit.*, p. 58.

7 *Views No. 1, op. cit.*, p. 48.

The 1948 period totally devastated him. The pain was too deep. Much later in 1968, he wrote about those years: 1948-50 were very useful years in my life, in terms of the negative experience acquired as 1936-48 years were of positive experience. After long lionisation by the entire Party, it was necessary to get kicks and curses with the same unanimity. The ideological immaturity of the Party and mine of course was such that there was no other way 'to learn' and solve the problems of building the Party in the manner that it can play its vanguard role in alliance with all forward-moving patriotic democratic forces.

The process of rethinking started at the rank-and-file level much later. Many of those comrades who shifted towards B.T. Ranadive reminisced about the mistaken path. Some of them later expressed their doubt and said: "Whether the new policy was suited to a country that had just achieved independence ought to have been considered seriously."⁸ Satyapal Dang, who was totally with the new leadership in 1948, much later felt in retrospect that "Joshi's assessment of the historic day (August 15, 1947) was much nearer the truth. Had it prevailed, the CPI's attitude towards free India's first government headed by Jawaharlal Nehru, would not have been totally negative. Possibly it would have been critically positive."⁹

Most of the comrades remained with the party after the change of line and did not support P.C. Joshi but there was stirring within. Almost all of them were brought into the communist movement "under the magnetic spell of Joshi's tremendously human personality" and so they were "naturally perturbed by the blatant move to remove Joshi by a thoroughly opportunist combination of Ranadive with

⁸ Manikuntala Sen, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

⁹ Satyapal Dang, unpublished article on P.C. Joshi, written on April 3, 2001.

Dange..."¹⁰ When Nikhil Chakravartty asked Bhupesh Gupta in what way the ouster of Joshi would help the party, what Bhupesh replied revealed the dilemma that several comrades like him and Nikhil were faced with. Bhupesh said:

Joshi's removal is certainly a great blow for many of us personally. But if the majority of the Party thinks that Joshi's line is wrong, then to stand up for Joshi might be misunderstood as support for his line. I know from my own experience how ruthless political leaders could be, but you and I come from classes which are not proletarian, and our attachment to Joshi may be taken as the subjective effection of our class ideology.¹¹

The Communist Party was banned. Many comrades landed in jail and many went underground. The two years of Left adventurism practically destroyed the party. Manikuntala Sen, a renowned woman leader of the Bengal party, has written in her memoirs:

That the strike was a powerful instrument in the hands of the workers had been demonstrated by the successful strike of 29 July, 1946. But how the weapon could be blunted when unnecessary strike calls were given became clear when the countrywide railway strike called in March 1949 by the Trade Union Congress failed to get any response.¹²

The Communists during Joshi's period were a dominant force among the tram and bus workers of Calcutta. Whenever a strike call was given, their response would be spontaneous. But the workers in this period were hesitant to join a strike. Many felt that peasants were misled

¹⁰ Nikhil Chakravartty's recollection, *Mainstream*, August 6, 1981.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Manikuntala Sen, *op. cit.*, p. 186

by the slogans of those days and the peasant movement was virtually liquidated everywhere barring Telangana. Students, gathered at their all-India conference at Bombay's Kamgar Maidan, were asked to break the police cordon. The police fired and many were injured. Similarly, in Calcutta, the police fired on a women's procession on April 27, 1949 killing four women comrades—Latika, Pratibha, Gita and Amiya—who were demanding the release of the political prisoners. From April 28 the political prisoners in the Calcutta jails went on a hunger strike in protest against these killings.

Those two years were suffocating for those who were underground in particular. It meant cooking, eating, sleeping, courtering, talking and passing resolutions of expulsion of comrades and nothing else. A witch-hunt to find out who was close to Joshi also vitiated the atmosphere. By the beginning of 1950, party comrades began realising the futility of the Left sectarian policy. After two years of Left adventurism, the international communist movement came to the rescue of the party and helped it come out of the rut. P.C. Joshi played a pivotal role in this regard. He sent his opinions on Ranadive's disastrous line in his letter to R.P. Dutt through Prof J.D. Bernal who had come to Calcutta to attend the Indian Science Congress held there in December 1949. In his letter to the foreign comrades on January 13, 1950, Joshi wrote at one point: "Please note how much our central leadership has talked of 'revolution' but not produced one serious self-critical review of the major strike action, not even a decent descriptive account."

The Cominform, which had replaced the Comintern, came out in early 1950 with an editorial in its journal, *For a Lasting Peace, For a People's Democracy (LPPD)*, indicating that the political line of the CPI in the prevailing period was wrong. It said the democratic forces in India would have to forge a united front of the national bourgeoisie, the

working class and both the rich and poor peasants to complete the democratic revolution. The editorial essentially mirrored Joshi's viewpoint. Ranadive was, in the meantime, removed from the leadership in a special plenary session in 1950 itself, and C. Rajeswara Rao of the Telangana struggle fame became the new party General Secretary with the new slogan "China's line is our line"—a consequence of China's growing prestige in the aftermath of the October 1949 revolution there. However, the damage appeared to be irretrievable. The party membership in those two years had drastically fallen from 90,000 to around 9000. A stream of artistes, writers, intellectuals, who were drawn to the party through the IPTA and Progressive Writers' Association, had drifted away.

In spite of the change in the party leadership, there was no marked shift in the party's political line. India continued to be regarded as a comprador, semi-colonial state and Nehru the 'running dog of imperialism', an epithet that was repeated in the documents adopted at the Asian Trade Union Conference held in Beijing at that time. The emergence of the Telangana leadership at the helm of the central party led to a continuation of the disastrous sectarian policy in a new garb: the 'Chinese model' replaced the Russian path with the peasantry given special prominence instead of the working class during the Ranadive period. The ruling bourgeoisie was regarded, as in the past, as serving the interests of imperialism, especially the British imperialists.

Joshi always differentiated between Sardar Patel and Nehru; he never considered the bourgeoisie to be a monolith. He was thus misconstrued by many as a petty bourgeois element who had come under the spell of Nehru. However, Joshi was not in favour of uncritical glorification of Nehru. In fact, he asked the Ranadive leadership to explain why there was no nationwide campaign to expose the motive

behind Nehru's visit to the USA in October 1949. At the same time, he felt that their dogmatic attitude prevented the Indian Communists from "playing a positive constructive role in building up the National State"¹³ and this kept anti-communism alive in the Congress. Communists were not an insignificant force and so their hostility "drove Nehru and other middle-of-the-roads in the Congress to turn the blind eye to the manipulations of the Congress Right and get the traditional anti-Congress reactionary feudal elements inside the Congress, as the ruling party, to give stability to the infant independent state."¹⁴

He also pointed out that "a newly established independent state that did not rest on the active cooperation of all the national elements, specially the traditional Left, all who had fought for freedom, but sought accommodation with feudal and other reactionary interests which could not but breed among the leaders of the new State unprincipled greed for autocratic power and make them victims of unlimited opportunities for going corrupt themselves and corrupting others".¹⁵ In fact, he had assailed the leadership of the Ranadive period for not raising the demand for the recognition of Mao Tse-Tung's government soon after the People's Revolution on October 1, 1949, and focussed on the irony that it was left to Nehru, the 'running dog of imperialism', to embrace China as an ally defying the imperialist diktat.

The Telangana line was challenged by a major section of the party leadership led by Ajoy Ghosh, S.A. Dange and S.V. Ghate. They circulated their joint position in a document known as the 'Three Ps Document' (as the underground

names of all the three leaders began with the word 'P'). This document too viewed India's independence as unreal and the Nehru Government as upholding the interests of the bourgeoisie and landlords collaborating with imperialism. It also endorsed the path of armed struggle with the only difference that it suggested India must follow an Indian path, and not the Russian or Chinese course.

P.C. Joshi opposed both the lines. His stand was that Indian independence was not a sham but a living reality. He put forward his arguments in favour of a National Front comprising the Congress, Communists and other democratic forces to defend national independence, safeguard the country's integrity and protect and further the interests of the toiling masses. The Joshi line was, however, not accepted by the party at its Special Conference in Calcutta in 1951 where the 'Three Ps Document' became the basis of a policy statement that was adopted. Rajeswara Rao was removed from the top party post and Ajoy Ghosh elected the new General Secretary. Although Joshi was re-admitted into the party on June 1, 1951 with the statement that 'the expulsion of Comrade P.C. Joshi from the Party was wrong and unjustified', he refused to become a part of the new post-Ranadive leadership because he felt that "Ajoy Ghosh and S.A. Dange were trying to do to Ranadive and those loyal to him and his line what he had done to me and others...". Even though the humiliation, ill treatment and slandering by Ranadive had left a deep scar in Joshi's mind, he reacted sharply to the treatment meted out to B.T. Ranadive and his associates by the party once they were dislodged from the party leadership. He did not approve of the ongoing factional fight and the manner in which the ideological issues were being patched up in the name of 'party unity'.

Joshi withdrew from the power struggle in the leadership but carried on his ideological battle in his own way. He returned to Allahabad, the place of his youth, at

13 P.C. Joshi, "A Self-Critical Communist Evaluation", *Mainstream*, May 29, 1965.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

the end of 1951 and started *India Today*, a monthly journal with O.P. Sangal as its editor. He explained the reason for bringing out this journal; he alleged that the party leadership did not circulate his documents. In an interview at the party headquarters in 1951, he also said: "I want to preach my views on the problems of the people. When they talk of discipline, my blood boils. I will go on doing it as long as there is no legal Party journal. If the centre says it cannot produce the open printed forum, I offer to produce it in all major languages if they ask for it. Also, to earn my living, I either become a journalist or go to the university. And I choose the first."¹⁶ Without directly attacking the party's official line, he lucidly spelt out his views for the ordinary party members and sympathisers while also giving them rich food for thought. In its November 1951 issue he wrote an article on the importance of India-China-Soviet alliance where he argued:

Mutually beneficial India-China-Soviet economic cooperation can help us solve our food crisis and get the means to industrialise our country. The path to Indian prosperity, Asian freedom and world peace lies through India-China-Soviet alliance. On the 34th anniversary of the Russian Revolution, a month after the second anniversary of Chinese liberation and after our own four years' experience of the Mountbatten Plan, this path stands out as the only alternative fly in the traditional imperialist spider's web.

After the decisive electoral victory of the Congress on an all-India scale, Joshi, while making a sharp critical appraisal of the Congress rule and its influence, asked the Left forces not to underestimate the significance of the Congress victory. He wrote in February-March 1952 in *India Today*:

To imagine the opponent weaker than is warranted by proven facts and known circumstances can never lead to finding the correct slogans and methods of struggle. It is necessary to recognise that the Congress has yet considerable reserves among the people; then alone can the Left face up to the tasks involved in winning over the mass yet misguided by the Congress. It is necessary to recognise that as the British ruling class through long experience became the most experienced, mature and cunning leadership among the capitalist-imperialist powers, so is the Congress leadership the most experienced political leadership that the colonial bourgeoisie has thrown up throughout the East. During these elections, it has shown that it can yet use the ideology of bourgeois nationalism, successfully indulge in freedom demagogy to cover up its imperialist alliances, its sell-out to foreign capital, and its anti-people policies. It is necessary to recognise that the Congress organisation is yet the most widely organised political machine inside our country which can yet exploit national traditions and draw the people to booths. It is necessary to recognise these real but unpleasant factors which constitute the strength of the ruling class to be able to successfully fulfil the serious task of vanquishing it.

In the same article he continued: "The election experience has proved that only when a broad United Front has been built, can the progressive non-party eminent individuals be assimilated inside it and bring honour to it and thus alone can the reactionary careerists be isolated and not allowed to exploit the anti-Congress discontent of the masses."

Joshi had the political understanding to realise the need for a united front of democratic forces and in that context he always valued the importance of non-party Left elements. In the same article he said: "The non-party Left elements

¹⁶ CPI File no. 1951/47, *Archives of Contemporary Indian History*, JNU.

are a very important constituent of our national life and their enthusiastic adherence greatly strengthens the development of the Democratic Front."

Joshi brought out this journal to strengthen Left democratic unity and he felt that this he was doing without violating party discipline. But after eleven months he was asked by the party leadership to close down the paper. He then shifted to Kanpur and took to trade union work with all seriousness. He soon became the district secretary of the party unit, busy in coordinating various activities. He formed the United Trade Union comprising Communists, Socialists and a vast number of non-communists led by Arjun Arora. Later he went underground to set up centres of the strike committees for organising an 84-day strike of textile workers while Arjun Arora, S.M. Banerjee and others were in the forefront of the movement. The two apparatus, underground and open, worked in perfect cohesion to ensure the success of the strike action.

In December 1952, Joshi went abroad for the first time as a member of the Indian delegation to the World Peace Congress in Vienna. On his way back, he went to London to meet, Bradley and others, as well as R.P. Dutt in particular. RPD attentively listened to Joshi and told him:

Ideological weakness is the collective problem in the CPI. Ajoy may have failings... but he is a realist, he will change and more will change. You have kept your head so far, have more patience and learn to use your head better. Read Lenin's *On Compromise*... learn Lenin's wisdom in handling your comrades-in-arms.¹⁷

In 1955, the Andhra defeat of the Communists and the Avadi session of the Congress where it opted for a 'socialistic pattern of society' came one after another. The Khrushchev

era also brought about a change in the world communist movement. All this helped the process of rethinking among the Communists. Joshi as a true Communist did not remain a silent spectator. He took the initiative to start a forum for discussion on the strategy and tactics of the Indian Communists. Joshi was not happy with Ajoy-Dange's political line which he felt was similar to that of Ranadive except that it discarded violent adventurism. The same anti-Congress Leftism was a parliamentary variant of the old policy. He felt there was an incoherence and lack of understanding of the reality particularly in the context of the Second Five Year Plan, Bandung Conference, Nehru's inclination to deepen friendship with China and the USSR, and the response of the communist leadership of those countries to India under Nehru.

The national scenario vindicated the Joshi line though the party never formally admitted it. India played a positive role in the Korean and Indo-China accords. The signing of the Panchsheel, the founding of the non-aligned movement and Nehru's Soviet tour and Bulganin-Khrushchev's visit to India in 1955 ushered in a new era of peace and progress.

The Palghat Party Congress in 1956 was a landmark in the CPI's history. It understood the importance of Indian independence, the Nehru Government's progressive foreign policy and the anti-imperialist and anti-feudal thrust of Indian planning under P.C. Mahalanobis. A resolution was moved by P.C. Joshi for an alternative path recognising India's independence and the policy of unity and struggle with the anti-imperialist national bourgeoisie. This marked a major shift in the political alignments within the party. Joshi recalled those days with sarcasm: "He (Ajoy Ghosh), the General Secretary, became the master tight-rope walker with B.T. Ranadive holding one pole and myself the other." The Palghat Congress, according to P.C. Joshi, formally oriented the party in the correct direction but kept

17 P.C. Joshi, "Rajani Palme Dutt and Indian Communists", *op. cit.*

its feet bound to Left sectarian chains.

Joshi could not reconcile with the dogmatism amongst the Communists that he felt prevented them from playing a positive constructive role in building the nation-state. The role of mere critics of the government's weaknesses was a passive role, not a constructive one. He even felt that this attitude kept anti-communism alive in the Congress.

The biggest single national event to follow the Palghat Congress was the 1957 general election and the formation of the first Communist Government in Kerala. While welcoming the event, Joshi expected a self-critical realistic estimate of the unfolding political developments. That did not happen; and after the government was toppled he wrote in retrospect in 1968: "Our sectarianism did not help us save the Kerala Government from the reactionary offensive."

The growth of Right-wing forces was the indirect outcome of the negative attitude of the Communists towards nation-building. He was one of the very few Communists who could foresee the danger of Right reaction as early as the early fifties. After the death of Nehru, Joshi wrote:

Looking back it seems to me now that ours was a desperate gesture of self-righteousness, a political mistake which was a godsend for the Right and which paved the way for the division of the national democratic forces in post-independence India.¹⁸

Joshi was elected to the Central Committee and he came back to Delhi to work at the central party headquarters in 1958. In his personal notes he wrote later: "The biggest mistake I made in my life was that after my election to the CC (Central Committee), I agreed to come and work in the Central party headquarters, instead of UP where I was

helping build the mass movement and educate the district and local leaders." He started editing the party organ *New Age* which he continued to do till 1962. He was not happy in Delhi, felt like a political prisoner, and often had to write things he did not believe in. He was critical of factionalism and bureaucratism within the party.

P.C. Joshi was a journalist par excellence. He started his political life writing incessantly on international, national and local issues and brought out several journals even when the party was illegal. Through these he reached out to the people. During his tenure as the editor of *New Age*, he travelled a lot to find out facts and see with his own eyes the happenings around the country. His report on the Jabalpur riots, published in *New Age* on March 12, 1961 as the lead story, shows how prophetic he was about the danger of the Jana Sangh elements who were not given any importance by the Left forces in the era of anti-Congress politics. Joshi personally went there to investigate the situation on the spot, met people from different walks of life and of various shades of political opinion. He found that the main plotters and organisers of these riots were the communal elements, and the Jana Sangh in particular, who made the Muslims their helpless victims with the police being mere onlookers. He found the Hindi daily of the Jana Sangh and the rumour-mongers had so much influenced the Press Trust of India (PTI) that the PTI version gave a completely false picture of these riots. He wanted the secular elements to draw a lesson from such riots. He wrote:

But all this would not have gone in vain if all the patriotic and secular elements in our national life draw the only truthful conclusion that these Madhya Pradesh riots were staged as a political rehearsal by the Jana Sangh for the coming General Election, as a part of their political tactic as their way to win popularity as the protector of the

¹⁸ P.C. Joshi, "The Nehru Legacy : A Self Critical Communist Evaluation", *Mainstream*, 29 May, 1965.

Hindu majority and to defame the Muslim minority as a fifth column of Pakistan and so on.¹⁹

The party faced a serious challenge when China attacked India and the Chinese Army came down all the way to Bomdila. It was a severe blow to Nehru's government which had always considered China to be its greatest ally. The then Defence Minister, Krishna Menon, was forced to resign. The differences within the party heightened with one section not accepting the Chinese action as aggression. The Sino-Soviet rift surfaced within the party in the aftermath of the attack and the inner-party tensions were aggravated with the arrest of a large number of those who were branded as pro-Chinese. Ideological differences were always there in the party. But the Chinese attack worsened the inner-party situation and engendered a crisis. Disturbed by the developments, Joshi observed:

The attack revealed that the Left was the loyal ideological political disciple of the Chinese dogmatists despite the collective majority line of its own Party, despite the overwhelming patriotic opinion in its own country, despite the considered collective opinion of the world communist movement headed by the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union) and that such a Left faction could not but wreck the party from within.

He, however, found "the Chinese attack proved that the decisive leadership of the anti-Left majority inside the Party was pragmatic, wayward and ineffective".²⁰

The ultra-Left within the party, apprehending isolation, published the 'Dange Letters' with the hope that the allegations of S.A. Dange being a British agent would

unnervethe leadership and they would be able to enhance their influence in the party. Joshi's position was that Dange should voluntarily step down from the Chairman's post and this would disarm the Leftists, thus clearing the ground for the real ideological battle. Joshi's advice was, however, ignored, with most of the leaders taking a factional, bureaucratic stand as they thought that a split in the party would rid the organisation of undesirable sectarian elements. Joshi was violently and vociferously opposed to this course of action not only on moral grounds but also for political reasons. He knew that the party leadership might be in a majority but the cadres at the lower level had remained politically uneducated since 1950 and were congenitally anti-Congress because anti-Congress dogmatism, the concept of the Congress being at the root of all problems, was the easiest way of rallying people around the party's banner. However, many of the leaders who eventually left were not politically Left sectarian but basically anti-Dange.

The party split had become imminent with a minority section walking out of the CPI's National Council meeting in New Delhi in April 1964. It was formalised with this group organising a parallel party Congress in Calcutta in October the same year. Joshi registered his protest against Dange being the Chairman at the National Council but remained neutral on this issue at the CPI's Bombay Congress in December 1964. However, as a mark of protest against Dange's re-election to the post at the Congress, he withdrew his name from both the Central Secretariat and the Executive of the party.

The party split was too painful for him. He wrote in his personal notes: "The experience was heart-breaking for I realised that we were unconsciously destroying our forty years, collective work, all that we had built up in our lifetime. My heart became worse than ever."

¹⁹ *New Age*, March 12, 1961.

²⁰ P.C. Joshi, "Plea for a Party Congress with Proper Preparation"—National Council Meeting of the CPI, June 26-July 2, 1963.

After the Bombay Congress, he refused to stay and work at the party headquarters any more despite all persuasion and pressure from the CPI leadership. He got his membership transferred to UP. He strongly felt he had the Party right to choose his place of work. But he could barely do any work for the UP party; he was either in bed at home or in sanatoria. This was the time when he read a lot and did all the thinking which was long overdue; this was the time when he decided to take up research work on the history of the Communist Party.

Joshi fought infantile Leftism since the beginning of his party life; however, he was most vocal in opposing the detention of Left Communist comrades under the DIR after the Chinese aggression and worked for getting them released. Union Home Minister Gulzarilal Nanda got arrested over a thousand such Communist leaders and cadres across the country following the Chinese attack. Joshi considered their detention inconsistent with the principle of parliamentary democracy and violative of the Indian Constitution. He argued:

The issue of political propriety and public morality is whether it is proper for a Home Minister to call the candidates of a political party, not declared illegal, traitors. Again, even if he did so in the heat of the moment, as a principled statesman he should have stuck to his own view even after electoral verdict repudiating his charge and vindicating the patriotic bonafides of the Left Communists who not only got successfully elected, but became the biggest single party, more than the Congress, in the State legislature (in Kerala).²¹

Joshi's politics went beyond the confines of the party. He was a patriot of a rare genre with a broad vision

²¹ P.C. Joshi, "Danger Signal for Democracy", *Mainstream*, August 15, 1965.

grounded on hard reality. He was clear about his perception of identifying the main enemy and, in his own words, the "curse of the nation". For him, the Rightist formation was the main enemy and in this context he unequivocally criticised the CPI-M for not realising this danger. He pointed out:

The leaders of the CPI-M, in terms of their own understanding, call me the most Rightist of what they call the Right Communist Party and are generous enough to characterise me as the most honest and consistent Rightist. I assure them in all earnestness that had there been really a revolutionary situation in India with the CPI-M leading a revolutionary wave, I would have been the repentant but the most ardent camp-follower of theirs. I would any day prefer to die fighting for the Indian revolution Red Flag in hand than die slowly of a heart damaged in the ups and downs of our united party life which I lacked the wisdom to understand. It is not a happy job to spend my time now in the musty National Archives and ponder over old party documents trying to discover where we went wrong and why we split our party which we had built together by our life's blood and all the sacrifices we were capable of making. And there is no other party that has a prouder heritage of more selfless work.²²

He continued to explain the political polarisation which had started unfolding itself:

Life itself has forced the various political elements despite their differences to get grouped into two blocs, primarily based on broad agreement about the desirable and undesirable path of India's future development. It is the question of the path forward, the status quo or social change that is the issue of the day.²³

²² P.C. Joshi, "Indian Constitution and Social Change", *New Thinking Communist* February 15, 2001.

²³ *Ibid.*

Indian Communists failed to understand the main accusation of the Rightist forces that "Indira Gandhi was too dependent upon and lenient towards the Communists of all shades and was thus making India a satellite of the USSR". In the political battleground to identify the main enemies and thereafter rally round the probable allies requires political acumen. The characterisation of Indira Gandhi's government became an area of difference among the Left. Joshi argued:

Indian foreign policy under the Indira Gandhi Government is proof enough that the anti-imperialist role of the national bourgeois section she represents is active and above all she sees and admits the danger of neo-colonialism which will become a mortal threat if our country is allowed to pass under Rightist leadership.²⁴

The CPI was considered a veiled agent of the Congress. As per the decision of the Bombay Congress, CPI shunned any alliance with the Muslim League while most of the other Opposition parties, particularly the CPM, defended it to build an anti-Congress front. The CPM had scored a thumping victory in the Kerala Assembly elections in 1965 while the CPI was reduced to a small force there. The result had shaken the CPI leadership and pushed it towards a position which was avowedly anti-Congress which is why it decided to join the Samyukt Vidhayak Dal (SVD) governments in the company of the Jana Sangh to prove its anti-Congress credentials.

Joshi was opposed to any alliance with non-secular elements for short-term political gains. That is why he could not agree to the CPI's preference for Kaka Subba Rao, a sympathiser of the Jana Sangh, over Zakir Hussain, a Gandhian secularist, in the 1967 presidential election. He

was critical of joining hands with all anti-Congress elements, including the Jana Sangh, to form the Samyukt Vidhayak Dal Ministries in several States after the 1967 general elections.

Joshi was disturbed at the deviation of the party's political line of National Democratic Front. He found the Left position taken by the CPM and CPI more opportunistic and populist, to achieve short-term electoral gains. Joshi, on the other hand, had a long-term perspective: for him, the Right reaction posed the real danger as he considered it to be the first and foremost enemy; he regarded any compromise with it as political opportunism.

He was, however, isolated in the party. He felt lonely at the party's Patna Congress in 1968. In spite of his illness, he attended the Congress having been elected a delegate from UP. His 15-minute speech in advocacy of an anti-Right front impressed many of the delegates; his critical assessment of the national situation projected the urgency of launching an all out offensive against the communal forces while calling for a breakup of the alliance with the Jana Sangh in the coalition Ministries. His amendment received over 33 per cent votes. He alienated himself from the leadership with his discordant note. He was removed from the party's National Council.

Another development which shook Joshi soon after the Patna Congress was the crisis in Czechoslovakia. Dubcek, the head of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, formulated a Programme of Action supposedly to strengthen the democratic foundations of the socialist order and revive the humane image of Marx and Lenin in the life of the Czechoslovak people putting an end to the Stalinist legacy. Dubcek was arrested and denigrated as a counter-revolutionary, while Soviet troops were sent to the country. Joshi did not approve of the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia and described it as "their greatest single

²⁴ *Ibid.*

mistake after the 20th Congress (of the CPSU)". He felt:

The distinctiveness and glory of communism, hitherto unquestioningly and demonstratively embodied in the USSR is at stake. The Chinese caused the first serious split in the world communist movement, which has damaged the good name of communism and the future of mankind a lot and given new lease of life to imperialism.

In the same article he said:

Can our party leadership shirk the moral responsibility of demanding an emergency session of the Consultative Conference of the CPSU and all the CPs (Communist Parties) of the world to discuss the Soviet position and action in Czechoslovakia? It is the urgent demand of the cause of Communism.²⁵

Joshi, however, expressed his appreciation at the way the Soviet Union corrected the mistake, making it clear that "Lenin's spirit and teachings are not dead but very much alive and active within the same Soviet collective party leadership"; but he felt that this lapse would "paint the USSR with the same brush as the Chinese and propagate that all Big Powers, whether imperialist USA or socialist USSR and People's China, are alike".²⁶ And that was Joshi's greatest regret.

Though Joshi was mostly unwell, he remained in the UP State Council of the party and this helped him to be in touch with the leadership in the coming days. Henceforth, he decided to organise the party in the Almora-Nainital region and started visiting the hills which was most refreshing for him as he recalled: "These weekly visits to these districts keeps me green and alive." He spoke about

the misery and backwardness of the hill areas and raised the demand for an autonomous administrative region comprising these areas within Uttar Pradesh to ensure power in the hands of the local people; he also organised a movement to address the problems of the hill areas. In 1970, he had the foresight to note:

The very fact that not only active political workers, but a large number of primary, secondary and college teachers, besides ex-soldiers and ex-army officers, are among the champions of the new demand is the guarantee that the next phase of the movement will be an unprecedented mass stir in the eight hill districts of UP.²⁷

He had deep attachment and special love for this hilly region where he toddled in his childhood and treaded and traversed the undulating landscape till he was old enough.

One of his childhood friends, an ayurvedic vaidya, gave him a huge plot of land a few miles away from Almora. His IPTA recruit, Balraj Sahni, founded a Balraj-Damayanti Trust which funded Joshi's last child—the Himalayan Socialist Ashram. This is situated in the village of Sirkot in the neighbourhood of the Binsar forest area. The former Chief Minister of UP, H.N. Bahuguna, also generously supported him in this endeavour. A cottage was built there. His last project in life, to build a Socialist Ashram in his home town, for political regeneration of the hill region was his return to his roots. His bond with the Himalayas was never broken.

The last days of his life were spent in Uttarakhand, JNU, working on a project on the history of the Left movement. He along with K. Damodaran devoted their time to building an archive for research on the Left movement in India. Joshi spent a lot of time in the National Archives and

²⁵ P.C. Joshi, "Lesson of the Czech Crisis", *National Herald*, September 4, 1968.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ P.C. Joshi, "Just Demand of Garhwal and Kumaon", *Mainstream*, December 12, 1970.

slogged for decades to complete his work on Communism in India, 1917-1947. He had been collecting materials—travelling abroad to Berlin and Moscow and also within the country reaching out to old comrades to collect old files, pamphlets, magazines. Joshi had a deep sense of history which few of the other Communist leaders had. That is why he regretted the manner in which a plethora of documents—all old archival material, literature of the Comintern, CPI and the Left parties from the earliest days to 1950—which were most valuable for constructing the history of the movement were destroyed by the comrades in charge carrying out orders in the name of party discipline between 1948 and 1950. "Thus," wrote Joshi, "my task of collecting material was unimaginably difficult."

Joshi could have been one of the best historians of our time had he not been in politics. He produced an outstanding work—which could be called a breakthrough in historical understanding—his analysis of the 1857 Rebellion and his collection of folklores on that Rebellion. Marx's perception of the Rebellion as a "national Revolt" definitely influenced Joshi. He brought out a collection of essays on the centenary year of the Revolt. It included essays written by distinguished Indian and foreign authors, critics and historians on the subject. The preface with an explanatory note by Joshi was itself a new historiography.

I have tried to deal with the controversies with which the 1857 uprising is shrouded. I am not a professional historian and had to resort to the old-fashioned method of speaking through lengthy quotations. If I annoy the modern stylist, my only defence is that I am supplying the younger readers with documentation from older books etc. which are not easily available to them.

The collection of folk songs on the 1857 Revolt begins with his special appreciation of folk art forms which he

considered the 'traditional media' for approaching the masses. His heart problem cut short his life; otherwise we could have seen historian Joshi coming out with more of such valuable analytical writing.

Joshi was a historian, he was a journalist, but, above all, he was essentially a political person dedicated to the people at large. He was truly a people's man. National and international events created stirrings in his mind—whether communal riots at his doorstep or the Chinese aggression or Czechoslovak crisis or Bangladesh liberation struggle, he always felt restless and reacted and responded through his pen if he was unable to rush to the spot. He could never remain a silent spectator. In spite of a damaged heart with severe health problems at the age of 64, he travelled through the hilly areas of the North-East—Tura, Dauki—to cross the border over to the then East Pakistan to stand by the people and do something for them at the time of their crisis. It was under his supervision that a small group was organised in West Bengal to go to the border areas of Meghalaya and Mymensingh. He was accompanied by Sunil Munshi, Prasun Majumdar and others. He had to 'hop, skip and jump through the militant outposts strewn throughout south and east of Meghalaya'.

Sunil Munshi recalls those days with great admiration for Joshi. He was all praise for his adaptability and forbearance in the difficult situation, withstanding the bad weather, rainy season and terrible roads. He never refused the gruel that was offered for dinner or lunch. He was always ready to eat anything anywhere, sleep wherever possible, even in a car if that was necessary. Squeezed in a small car with buzzing mosquitoes allaround, making sitting unbearable, Joshi's smiling face never showed any sign of discomfort. After returning to Delhi, he wrote a series of articles, entitled "Bangladesh Jatra: A Political Pilgrimage". He began:

Having worked all my life from the age of twenty *in* the Communist Party, I am now doing research *on* the history of communism in India while remaining in the Communist Party of India and doing my party chores. Even at my age, 64 years now, it became literally impossible for me to do my 'research' sitting in the comfort of my room in the Jawaharlal Nehru University when a resurgent Anti-Imperialist National Democratic Revolution was on in Bangladesh, once our own flesh and blood and now our closest neighbour and proving itself in action as our best brother. My restlessness became unbearable when I realised that our ruling elite was satisfied with coining wise phrases and our national political parties were only indulging in demagogy and goondaism but doing nothing at all for the people of Bangladesh.²⁸

Speaking at a meeting on Freedom and the Bangladesh Revolution a day after the liberation of that country and the birth of a new nation, that is, on December 17, 1971, Joshi said:

While this is a matter for rejoicing, let us not start acting like Big Brother outlook, which is so natural on our part just like self-righteous Brahmins who have moulded owe, let us not hurt their national pride because that will be our undoing. Bangladesh will like us if we respect them. Let us not underrate the Mukti Bahini that began the fight. They did the spadework and paved the ground for the march of the Indian Army.

He might have been away from party politics, but his political mind was never away from the people. That was P.C. Joshi.

VI

THE HUMANIST

Joshi was a multifaceted personality. In fact, he had in himself many outstanding qualities. He was a communist, an organiser, a freedom fighter, a nationalist, a writer, a journalist, an art critic—all rolled into one but, above all, he was an exceedingly kind, warm hearted, compassionate and sensitive human being.

P.C. Joshi could easily touch the heart of any person he came in contact with. In fact, he treated the Party comrades as his sisters and brothers, and with his unbounded love and care towards them he automatically became the head of a cohesive Party family.* Joshi experienced a motherless childhood and that explains his deep desire to exude warmth and affection to all who came to know him—indeed his childhood explained his eagerness to recreate the Communist Party as a family.

Inside the Party in the forties, everybody was equal and equal treatment was meted out to everyone. Joshi's one-time typist and private secretary Ishwar Bhatt reminisces

* Unfortunately, what was considered his plus point in this regard became a matter of criticism by many in the party; many of his opponents used this in 1948 to berate him, saying the Party was not a family of friends but a revolutionary fighting organisation.

about the commune life of the workers in Raj Bhavan, the CPI headquarters in Bombay in those days: "The Party bore all their needs and expenses and gave them only Rs 10 as pocket money per month. It was a great experiment." Everybody functioned with a sense of discipline. Joshi commanded an authority but that was not of a dictatorial kind—within the party all members received equal treatment. The life in Raj Bhavan has been remembered with great veneration by his associates who worked with him in those days.

The party kitchen at the Raj Bhavan building was a huge mess where all the comrades in the central establishment had their meals. Mai, the mother of Dilshad Chari (Didi), and Leila Sundarayya, wife of P. Sundarayya, were in charge of the kitchen department. Comrade Ganu was the chief cook. Meals were vegetarian except on Sundays when non-vegetarian food was served to those who wanted it. Meals were served at 10 am and 7 pm, and tea 7 am and 2 pm. The bell rang at the given times, when comrades queued up to take their meals or tea. They washed their utensils after each meal. Subrata writes:

What struck me when I came to work at the party headquarters, was the warm relationship between the leaders and the ordinary members of the party. Comrade Joshi's own way of life and personal behaviour generated an environment of a joint family in our commune. We had our meals together. Each one of us washed his/her dishes and put them in a proper place.

Mai was a Saraswat lady from Mangalore and she married a Muslim comrade from Hyderabad. She died of cancer. She worked at the party commune till she was moved to the hospital. She took her responsibility in the kitchen as a party work. Ishwar Bhatt recalled an incident which shows how Joshi built up the commune as a joint

family having emotional attachment of all the members who stayed there. P.C. Joshi cried loudly in front of the funeral pyre of Mai in the crematorium; it was for him like the loss of his mother.

But soon it was realised that by living in one place within the four corners of the Party headquarters, the inmates lost touch with the people and the life, problems, sufferings of the masses. Joshi feared the comrades may become just like machines without any human touch. So at a later stage, many comrades were encouraged to lead a family life, stay among the people and work for the Party.

Joshi was exceedingly meticulous in running the central party office. His close and reliable aides like Govind Vidyarthi, M.C. Acharya and R.K. Bodha Rao looked into every detail under the supervision of Comrade Ghate.

A secret 'dump' was maintained in the apartment of a sympathiser's house where all the archival documents and files were kept. Anything of consequence used to be removed from Raj Bhavan lest in a search raid it fell in the hands of the police.¹

Joshi was a tireless worker with great stamina. He did not know what rest was. He would work till late hours in the night, writing articles for central party journals, penning instructions to Central Committee members and party leaders. His circular was never sent in a bland form. There was always a covering note explaining how to implement it in the specific situation of the region. This shows that he knew the region like his finger tips, and the person individually. He used to spend hours working on covering notes and letters which he also despatched to sympathisers all over India. Each individual family was a concern of the party.

1 Ganesh Shukla, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

He was a marathon writer as Ishwar Bhatt recalls:

He had deep concentration and once he began to write he would be completely oblivious of the surroundings. In the midst of such writings, he would suddenly get up, walk up and down the rooms or the corridors nodding and shaking his head, waving his hands and mumbling to himself and suddenly would go back to his chair and begin writing again without stop. He would chew raw tobacco squeezing it in his palm with his fingers.

Old comrades always speak about Joshi's simplicity and magnetic power to draw people. Satyapal Dang writes: When I saw Comrade Joshi for the first time, I was greatly struck by his simplicity. He was dressed in shorts and a half-sleeved shirt. He spoke so fast that I found it very difficult to understand all that he said. And yet I felt drawn to him and my nervousness began melting away.²

His simplicity was a vital feature of his character. His aesthetic sense revealed a creative mind. When he stayed in a small room in Asaf Ali Road in Delhi, he with the help of a Sardarji carpenter innovated a few furnitures—a bed with box, a folding table and three-four boxes. He said to junior P.C. Joshi, the economist, at that time: "Create space where there is no space." That explains the philosophical mind of Joshi.

Joshi never indulged in any kind of luxuries. Till the end of his life he wore half-pant and half-shirt to save cloth except in winter when he took to woollens or *galabandh* coat.

Those who worked with him knew how straightforward he was as a person. Ishwar Bhatt recollects:

I had the opportunity of knowing his mind also. During my tenure with Comrade Joshi he did not say anything against the other Polit-Bureau members and he gave great

respect to their opinions...

Nobody could call Joshi an authoritarian or a dictator.. The charge could be the other way that he was too mild and did not fight back enough and took a defensive stand in the inner-party struggle.

He was easily accessible, approachable and humble to his colleagues. P.C. Joshi had a great sense of wit and humour. He affectionately teased his loved ones, followed by a big laughter. Mohit Sen reminisces about one of such lighter moments in his autobiography. He writes:

I was in the library struggling through the *Communist Manifesto* when I felt a hand on my shoulder, I looked up and saw the smiling cherubic face of P.C. Joshi, the then General Secretary of the CPI. With his usual slight stutter, he asked me what I was reading. When I told him what it was, he said in mock seriousness that I should stop the effort at once. He went on to say, 'Marx wrote for Lenin, Lenin wrote for Stalin, Stalin wrote for me. I write for you. Just read me!' He then threw back his head and roared with laughter.³

His letters to friends are full of wits; he was a person 'of jovial behaviour with always a smile on his face'.

One point is clear: Joshi never indulged in small talk, he never slandered or maligned persons with whom he differed. He would wage struggle to convince one of the correctness of his viewpoint, but would not indulge in petty bickerings one comes across so often in every political establishment.

It was during his tenure as the Party General Secretary that Joshi met Kalpana Dutt, who was by then a legendary figure in the revolutionary movement of Bengal. She took part in the Chittagong uprising in the 1930s and was

2 Satyapal Dang, *op.cit.*

3 Mohit Sen, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

sentenced to life imprisonment when two of her associates, Surya Sen and Tarakeshwar Dastidar, were hanged. Subsequently, there was a massive movement for the release of political prisoners. Rabindranath Tagore and C.F. Andrews also intervened on her behalf. As a consequence, her sentence was commuted. On her release, she found several of her Chittagong associates working for the Communist Party. Influenced by the communist ideology, she too was drawn into the Party and became a dedicated worker in Chittagong. She went to Bombay to attend a Party class in December 1942 and met Joshi there. They were married on August 14, 1943. The wedding took place in the Party headquarters with Muzaffar Ahmed attending from the bride's side and B.T. Ranadive from groom's side. It was indeed a historic wedding bringing together two revolutionaries from the hill tracts of Chittagong and Almora. Cups of tea were served along with biscuits on the occasion. The wedding took place on the open terrace of the Party headquarters where Benoy Roy and members of the Party's Cultural Squad sang a few revolutionary songs. One of Joshi's relatives sent a beautiful red sari for Kalpana—it was later cut into pieces and turned into a few red flags.

During the Great Bengal Famine (that occurred the same year), Kalpana got involved in organising relief work and campaigning for rationing in Chittagong as an activist of the Mahila Atma Raksha Samiti (MARS). With both husband and wife working dedicatedly for the Party, they had barely any time left for family life. Their first child, Suraj, was born in 1946: a pair of gold bangles was sent for the child from Joshi's family—but that was donated to the Party fund. Joshi himself collected funds from relatives, friends and given an opportune moment asked for funds

from new acquaintances. When Joshi met Mohit Sen's father, they had an hourlong discussion at the end of which Joshi promptly said: "Judge, you haven't given us anything." Mohit's father instantly took out his wallet and left it on the table.⁴ In 1947 Joshi's second son, Chand, was born. By that time Joshi was cornered within the Party, but Kalpana stood by him in his ordeals. She had to endure pressure from the Party leadership to leave her 'renegade' husband, but she remained loyal to Joshi. Kalpana's stature and prestige in the Party was so high that no one in the leadership could dare suspend or expel her from the organisation. However, for both Joshi and Kalpana, it soon became impossible to stay in the Party headquarters and they had to vacate the place. Thereafter, they shifted to Calcutta and moved around in search of shelter on their own. He stayed at Prof Susobhan Sarkar's Elgin Road residence, and, for a few days, at Sunil Janah's place as an interim arrangement. After a few months, Joshi was summarily expelled and all the comrades and sympathisers were mandated by the party leadership not to keep any contact with Joshi. Thereafter, he stayed at Howrah in a rented house.

His relentless struggle for something he deeply cherished—a political line envisaging a National Democratic Front that would simultaneously struggle against the erroneous policies of the ruling national bourgeoisie and support the latter's correct path of building an independent, united, self-reliant as also anti-imperialist nation-state while waging an uncompromising battle against Right reaction including communal obscurantism of every hue—isolated him from the mainstream communist movement. He was dedicated heart and soul to the country, to the people and to the Party and its members: so he found little time to devote to his near and dear ones and neglected his family. His two sons were deprived of their father's company and

⁴ Mohit Sen, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

guidance that they needed so much in their adolescence. His wife Kalpana was not only the breadearner—that often happens with Party whole timers—but also became the patriarch in her extended family. She gradually drifted away from active politics and spent more time in other pursuits.

Joshi's approach to comrades was on an individual basis. He took care of their personal problems. He could guide comrades facing difficult situations and obstacles from orthodox families. He never asked them to cut off their family ties but urged them to fight from within. Rekha Jain, an IPTA activist who was brought to the Party's Cultural Squad by her husband Nemi Chand Jain, belonged to a conservative family of UP. Her mother-in-law became angry on learning that her daughter-in-law was dancing in a troupe—something she felt brought shame to the family. When she narrated the problem to Joshi, he advised her to patiently persuade her mother-in-law and even bow down to her, if necessary. He also told her to understand that her mother-in-law had sent such a strong letter to her because of her concern and love for her daughter-in-law. Joshi's advice to Rekha worked and in future she became her mother-in-law's favourite daughter-in-law in spite of her participation in IPTA activities.

Joshi wanted every worker to be the best in her or his workplace. That would attract others towards the person and help the latter draw them into the activities of the Party, the country and the society at large. Joshi had a remarkable power to assess the abilities and talents of a person and accordingly encouraged her or him in their creative pursuits.

Even a chance meeting with a party member or sympathiser was enough for him to identify his quality of heart and mind and to what use he or she could be put and in what manner. He could win affection in no time and also endear himself to whomsoever he met. But for

this quality of his head and heart, he would have made the CPI the initiator of India's cultural renaissance.⁵

His day-to-day encouragement helped the party comrades grow and bring out their hidden talents. That is why it is no wonder that in the Joshi period the Party could help nurture and develop so many photographers, dancers, artists, writers and journalists. The copies of the party journals like *People's War* and *People's Age* in the forties are a treasure house of creative activities—be it cartoons, sketches, photographs, reports of the people's life and struggle. Joshi was a perfectionist and a professional par excellence in whatever work he did, and he expected the same from all his fellow-travellers.

Joshi's personal behaviour generated a family feeling in the commune—having meals together, washing the dishes, etc. Joshi was a part of that very life. He joined the comrades in hawking the English, Hindi, Urdu journals on the streets of Bombay. This brought him close to the Party cadres. Even today those days are remembered with so much feeling of admiration by those who are still alive.

His kindness and compassion were rare qualities for leaders of that stature. Subrata Banerjee, an old Party associate, recalls one particular evening while he was staying in the Party headquarters in Bombay:

I had fever. I lay in the bed in what was called the Sick Room. Joshi walked to and fro past my room, making all sorts of signs with his fingers, as he was wont to do when he was deep in thought. Suddenly, his eyes fell on me. He kept all thoughts aside and came and sat beside me, put the palm of his hand on my forehead to check the temperature and after a while said: 'Feeling homesick? But we are by your side. This too is your family and we

5 Ganesh Shukla, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

are all part of it.' Those words were of great comfort for me that evening.

Joshi was very considerate to women comrades. He never wanted them to spend their time only in kitchen. While recalling the Allahabad days, Rekha Jain writes that once she made three or four items for a meal for Joshi. Seeing the items he told her not to waste so much time in cooking, rather to put everything in one and make a hot pot. This attitude of a simple life and giving primary importance to work impressed Rekha a lot.⁶ A wife of an ordinary comrade remembered till the fag end of her life how Joshi was one of the few leaders who would never bother her even if he had to come at late hours of night. He carried a packet of *chirua* (flattened rice), himself washed it and ate, not allowing the housewife to cook again. That kind of consideration for women or wives of comrades is hardly seen among leaders who generally expect from cadres to look after the leaders.

He stayed in the late sixties in 12 Meenabagh, when Kalpana was working in the Indian Statistical Institute, New Delhi. Kalpana was extremely protective about her children and Joshi, too, was too strict in handling them. There were incidents of conflict and tension with Kalpana who was an equally strong personality. From Meenabagh, Joshi shifted to R-12 Hauz Khas on a rented accommodation in a *barsati*, and finally to 27, Dakshinapuram in JNU from 1975 onwards. Joshi wrote in a letter to Ishwar Bhatt on November 17, 1973: "My family is alright but each lives his own life. I am a mis-fit, I cannot get out of my commune habits."

His heart problem cut short his life. From late sixties, Joshi suffered strokes a number of times. In 1975, he had

another heart attack and was hospitalised in the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi for the whole month of September. Later in the same year he was sent to Moscow for treatment, but it was of no use. He could not express himself properly but his eyes were telling, sadness was writ large on his face. He always wanted to live and work more for the people. The last Party Congress that he attended was in Bhatinda in 1978. He was brought in a wheel-chair. Once he was spotted, comrades were elated and brought him to the dais.

He spent his last days in Dakshinapuram in JNU. He was happy whenever anyone went to meet him. His warmth towards even those who were his political opponents revealed his greatness. He could forgive and forget the past. He died on November 9, 1980 at the age of 73. Much of his work—including his documentation of the Left movement—was left unfinished. His dream of a Himalayan Socialist Ashram in Almora remained unfulfilled; in his last days he wished to return to his roots and work there. That never happened.

His innocent *pahari* smile will remain etched in one's memory forever. He will be remembered as a Communist patriot of a rare kind in the history of our country.

⁶ Rekha Jain, "Reminiscences", *Kathadesh*, December 2006, p. 16.